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Black Brazilian Female Dancer-Choreographer-Educators: Creating Alternative Axes of Action in the African Diaspora

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Black Brazilian Female Dancer-Choreographer-Educators: Creating Alternative Axes of Action in the African Diaspora

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2019

Dedication

For Oya, who moves my life

To Gustavo Melo Cerqueira, Mowumi Oliveira Melo and Ayodola Oliveira Melo with infinite love.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to my family who keep supporting all my dreams: Jaciara Ornélia Nogueira de Oliveira, Ernande Melo de Oliveira, Alice Nogueira e Oliveira Brandão, Antonio Vicente Nogueira e Oliveira, Ernayde Melo, Cintia Oliveira, and Ivo Brandão.

I am also grateful to Iya Nla Beata de Yemonjá, Babá Adailton, Iyá Doia, Iyá Ivete, and my *asé* family from the Ile Omiojuaro and Ile Asé Omi for their spiritual advising.

My unending gratitude to my Supervisor, Dr. Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, for her advising and efforts in making this Ph.D. dissertation and my academic work better than I conceived.

My gratitude also to Dr. Rebecca Rossen, Dr. Laura Gutierrez, Charles O. Anderson, and Dr. Niyi Afolabi, my dissertation committee members, who have provided transformative comments about my research throughout this process.

My special thanks to Rebekah Fowler an amazing editor and friend.

My special thanks to Edileusa Santos and Rosangela Silvestre for the inspiration and collaboration, Jorge Alberto for the design, and Fátima Carvalho, Tânia Bispo, Sandra Santana, Sueli Ramos, Stephanie Silva, Deko Alves, Vera Passos, Leigh Jones, Moriah Flagler for the amazing testimonies.

My gratitude to all generous and talented faculty members, Students, and Staff, for making my journey more pleasant and to my friends who helped me to keep healthy and strong while facing the challenges during my time in Austin. Specially to my Brazilian partners of journey: Daniela Gomes, Amely Branquinho, Matheus Laureano,

Carla Ramos, Davi Nobre, Giovana Risos, Daniela Perdigão, Zeca Dom, Carla Muhamed, Dora Santana.

My scholarship was possible due to the CAPES Foundation of Brazilian Ministry of Education, which subsidized four years of my graduate study.

Abstract

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2019

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This dissertation examines the potential of black women dancer-choreographer-educators to re-imagine their artistic, cultural, and sociopolitical identities in the African diaspora. By introducing the concept of alternative axes of action as spatial longitudinal oblique lines established slightly outside of a mainstream vertical axis where bodily balance and motion – and sociopolitical actions – are often assumed to be performed, I argue that black women in the African diaspora have continuously faced systemic "pushes" off of this mainstream vertical "center-line" which expose them to what M. Jacqui Alexander calls the "nodes of instability." I contend that by playing with this instability in corporeal and sociopolitical dimensions, black women are developing the ability to find balance in motion and creating alternatives for their actions. By looking at Rosangela Silvestre's and Edileusa Santos's choreographies, methodologies, and participation in the history of dance – with especial emphasis on their travel and exchange between Brazil and the U.S. – I identify alternative movement languages, ways of performing Brazil, and ways of continuing to forge a black dance diaspora.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When in 2006 I completed my ten-year journey working as a dancer and rehearsal director with Dance Brazil[1], traveling between Salvador and the U.S., Europe, South America, and Oceania, I could not anticipate the importance of that experience for my artistic and academic career. As a black woman, the practical and intellectual connections I established while touring with Dance Brazil were imperative to my interest in the lived experience of black subjects across the world, the artistic work of other black women, and the dynamism of the African diaspora. Through dance, I was able to understand the existence of an African diaspora that was "a rhizomorphic, fractal structure of transcultural, international formation" (Gilroy 4) that allowed dancer-choreographers to create artistic, cultural, and political unity identifying commonalities and differences in their relations with African heritage and blackness. Indeed, I perceived the African diaspora as a transnational formation instead of "international formation" as Paul Gilroy describes, because it extends beyond the relationship among nation-states to a global perspective, as Patricia Hill Collins describes while comparing the two concepts.[2] By perceiving this transnational formation as "a dynamic, continuous, and complex phenomenon stretching across time, geography, class, and gender" (Harris 4) I noticed that dancer-choreographers were able to look at African traditions beyond ethnic

[1] A Brazilian contemporary dance company founded in 1977 and based in New York City.

[2] I understand African diaspora as a transnational formation based on Patricia Hill Collins's description of transnationalism as "a view of the world that sees certain interests as going beyond the borders of nation-states. Whereas internationalism emphasizes the relationship among nation-states, transnationalism takes a global perspective" (Collins 321).

essentialisms, understanding the processes of transformation and re-creations that these traditions had been exposed to throughout the diaspora. Thus, the dancer-choreographers' migrations that have contributed to the ongoing forging of a dance diaspora and the way in which race, gender, and nation are embedded in this process became key investigations that grew in my own academic and artistic work.

After completing my journey of traveling around and becoming attentive to the African diaspora, I moved from Salvador to Rio de Janeiro where I awoke to sociopolitical implications and black subjects' corporeal responses to their experiences of oppression. I looked at bodily behaviors in spaces of resistance such as popular dance expressions (capoeira, *samba de roda*, etc.) and Candomblé. It was during my research with the dance company *Arquitetura do Movimento* (Movement Architecture) that I made the initial contact as a dancer-researcher in the sacred space of a *terreiro de Candomblé* (temple of the Candomblé religion)[3]. At that time, I began to reflect on the specificity of the movements and corporeal postures of practitioners and entities within those territories which caught my attention for their "playing with instability," specifically when I was observing the performances of *Caboclo, Boiadeiro,* and *Marujo*[4] entities. The potential of that bodily behavior as a strategy of resistance by black communities in Brazil awoke my interest in researching it. Another inspiring experience occurred during the process of creation and conversations with the director and cast of the theatrical piece *Orirê – saga de um herói que confrontou a morte* (*The Good Head: The Story of a Hero who*

[3] I had already visited Candomblé houses in Salvador, Bahia, before that time. However, that visist to the Ilê Omiojuaro in Rio de Janeiro was the first time I went to a Candomblé house as a dancer-researcher.

[4] *Caboclo*, *Boiadeiro*, and *Marujo* are Brazilian entities worshiped in Afro-Brazilian religions—Candomblé and Umbanda.

Confronted Death¸2010), Gustavo Melo Cerqueira. This piece drew from Yoruba philosophy and Candomblé's gestures and rituals alongside Afro-Brazilian popular dances. During my work with them as a performer and movement director, the group encouraged reflections, namely on the lived experience of black subjects and discussions around cultural behavior—discussions that questioned verticality and looked at instability as a fundamental condition of black people's experiences in the African diaspora. It was also with this group, while conducting corporeal training as part of my initial experimentations with an unfinished project titled O Barco or The Boat (2010), that I began to address playing with instability as a starting point for the training I was proposing. The theorizing developed in this study emerged from aspects observed during all these experiences.

This dissertation examines the potential of black women dancer-choreographer-educators to reimagine and create their artistic, cultural, and sociopolitical identities within the African diaspora, introducing the concept of alternative axes of action as spatial longitudinal oblique lines established slightly outside a mainstream vertical axis where bodily balance and motion—and sociopolitical actions—are often assumed to be performed. I argue that black women in the African diaspora have continuously faced systemic "pushes" off of this mainstream vertical "center-line" which expose them to what M. Jacqui Alexander calls the "nodes of instability." I contend that by playing with instability in corporeal and sociopolitical dimensions, black women are developing the ability to find balance in motion, creating alternatives for their actions. By looking at Rosangela Silvestre's and Edileusa Santos's choreographies, methodologies, and

participation in the history of dance—with special emphasis on their travel and exchange between Brazil and the United States—I identify alternative movement languages, ways of choreographing and performing Brazil in transnational venues, and ways of continuing to forge a black dance diaspora. Rosangela Silvestre, acknowledged worldwide as one of the leading authorities on contemporary Brazilian dance with African influence, is recognized for her development of Silvestre Technique, which has been adopted not only by many members of the Brazilian dance community but also by dancers in the United States, Argentina, and Australia, among other countries. Edileusa Santos, in turn, has been recognized for the development of her unique methodology, Dance of Black Expression, taught in multiple states in Brazil and in the U.S., and for her activism within Brazilian academia. Both Silvestre and Santos have played remarkable roles in the history of dance in Brazil and of Brazilian dance in the U.S. [5]

Inspired by the work of these remarkable black dancer-choreographer-educators, in this dissertation I also develop a diagram and a theory of corporeal experience in which movers play with instability, creating bodily alternatives to finding equilibrium while transitioning between longitudinal oblique axes in space. The experience that I propose begins with improvisation-based exercises that explore movement slightly off of a vertical body alignment and draw from the gestural vocabulary and premises observed in Afro-Brazilian *samba de roda*, capoeira, and Candomblé. Next, it encourages

[5] Isaura Oliveira and Augusto Soledade are remarkable artists who have contributed to the history of Brazilian dance in the U.S. with their remarkable works as well. However, my previous experience working with Santos and Silvestre, as well as my focus on gender and the artists' actions in transit, or in other words, a continuing connection with Brazil as they extend their works within the African diaspora drove me toward Silvestre's and Santos's works.

reflection on the movers' bodily impressions in relation to black feminist reflections on systemic destabilizing acts and women's responses to them. My most recent teaching experiences with a group of black women dancers who performed the piece *Mulheres do Asé* (*Asé* Women) choreographed by Edileusa Santos in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, in 2016 during my ethnographic studies, and leading a workshop at the 2018 Collegium for African Diaspora Dance Conference have been driven by this ongoing investigation.

The participation of black female dancer-choreographer-educators in the history of black concert dance in Brazil and Brazilian dance in the U.S. have been overlooked in Brazilian and U.S. scholarship. While U.S. authors and scholars tend to pay less attention to concert dance in Brazil and to the contributions of Brazilian artists in the U.S., the few Brazilian authors and scholars who study dance history in Brazil tend to ignore the importance of black concert dance as formative in the field of Brazilian modern and contemporary dance, and rarely expand their studies to the work these artists develop beyond nation-state borders. The majority of U.S. scholars who reflect on African diaspora dance—Thomas DeFrantz, Kariamu Welsh-Asante, Peggy and Murray Schwartz, Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Yvonne Daniel, among others—position the U.S., U.S. artists, and the U.S. perspective as central in their analysis. Although it is possible to find some studies that expand their gaze to Caribbean, Cuban, Brazilian, and Nigerian cultures and artists, not much attention is paid to the multiple layers of black concert dance produced outside the U.S. Yvonne Daniel acknowledges the contributions of black Brazilian artists who have developed their work in the U.S., referring to concert dance artists in her work *Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora Dance*. However, Daniel offers a

general approach without dedicating much space for deep analysis. The works of Barbara Browning, Ana Paula Holfling, and Christina Rosa, who play in the space between Brazil and the U.S., are exceptions in the midst of this vast scenario.

In Brazilian dance scholarship the study of dance history and the participation of black concert dance in this history is rare. If on the one hand, certain styles of dance (classical ballet, German modern dance, and U.S. modern and contemporary dance), regions of the country (the south and southeastern states), and events have been privileged in Brazilian dance historiographies (C. F. Silva 13), on the other hand, as a consequence, other dance styles, regions, and artistic works have been overlooked. Such is the case of black concert dance, black artists, and the productions from north and northeastern regions of the country. Most of the authors who address black dance in Brazil focus on the journey of a specific artist or company such as Nadir Nobrega, Margarida Motta, Mariana Monteiro and Lilian Santiago, and Paulo Melgaço da Silva Junior. By accessing several of these specific stories, researchers can cross-reference information and construct their historic narratives. Other authors and scholars—Renata de Lima Silva and Carmen Luz, for example - develop narratives around multiple events, but in those cases, as the historic narrative is not their main focus, there is not much space for deep analysis. Fernando Marques Camargo Ferraz is an author that offers a more expanded perspective in this context. However, none of these scholars' advance toward an analysis of the work these artists develop outside Brazil.

Although this dissertation is not a historiographical study of Brazilian black dance, it offers a look at not only the activities of black dancer-choreographer-educators

in the history of dance in Brazil, but also the work of these artists in the U.S., a space ignored in previous studies. Furthermore, the close readings of choreographies and detailed analysis of dance methodologies offered here are rare in Brazilian and even U.S. dance scholarship. Through this work it is possible to observe the importance of black Brazilian dancers' routes across the globe in the ongoing formation of a dance diaspora and the maintenance of a connection to Afro-Brazilian roots in the expansion of African diaspora dance as a transnational process. Finally, this dissertation privileges and illuminates the voices and works of black women artists, in contrast to a general trend in academic and popular discourses to privilege male participation in and contributions to the past and present shaping of a black dance field.

My own positionality as a black woman dancer-researcher who worked with the main subjects of this study requires a "critical-reflexivity" (Madison 198), which calls for a "sense of implicating and complicating who we are always and already in the production of our labor, and the effects of our positions and positionalities with the diverse communities in which we circulate" (198). I am attentive to my personal perspective and identity so that I may reflect on my self-involvement as a black woman and dancer in my interactions and interpretations. The contribution of this dissertation may go beyond the blindness caused by proximity to the subjects. Nevertheless, concomitant to the attempt to avoid blindness caused by proximity, inspired by Omi Osun Joni L. Jones' performance ethnography methodology[6], I understand that my research

[6] This assertion is based on information gathered during the course Performance Ethnography at University of Texas in Austin in which I was enrolled during the Fall 2014.

involves advocacy and a sort of aesthetic-political accountability with the community I feel a part of.

Despite the fact that race, gender, and nationality are key to my investigation, sexuality has deliberately been discussed here to a lesser extent for two main reasons. First, given the previous knowledge I had of Silvestre's and Santos's work, I saw that sexuality had not been explicitly addressed in their choreographies as a theme or focus of their creations, especially in terms of homosexuality and queerness. In chapter 4, when I analyze Santos's piece *Serra Pelada*, I find space to discuss her courage to play with indicators of transvestism, queerness, and the hypersexualization of the [black] female body, but this is not recurrent in my analysis. Second, during my ethnography, I felt a generational trend—of which I am a part—to keep these conversations private, rather than bring them to the public sphere. Despite my close relationship to most of the subjects I interviewed, I did not feel comfortable directly addressing many questions about sexuality; I also noticed that while talking about identity, most of them did not explicitly include sexuality in their answers. This was particularly true of women, which means that when such conversations were explicit, they came from men. Knowledge about each other's sexual preferences and sexuality was subtle. In Odundê, for example, there was a dancer who identified as lesbian, something that was not hidden, but it was not on display, either. In addition, I noticed a sort of relationship with notions of respectability and heterosexuality that seemed to influence black women of that generation in the present.

RE-THINKING THE CENTRAL LINE OF BODY'S ALIGNMENT

Researchers and professionals in the West who work with anatomy and kinesiology have been almost unanimous in their use of an internationally and "generally" approved vocabulary to refer to the human body structures and their relationship with the space such as Blandine Calais-Germain and Stephen Anderson in *Anatomy of Movement* (1993); Irmgard Bartenieff and Dori Lewis in *Body Movement: Coping with the Environment* (1980); Siler Brooke in *The Pilates Body: the Ultimate at Home Guide for Strengthening, Lengthening, and Toning your body without machines* (2000); Gayanne Grossman in *Dance Science: Anatomy, Movement Analysis, Conditioning* (2015), among others (Palastanga, Field, and Soames 3). In order to facilitate communication and understanding among these professionals, an unambiguous position was adopted which became a reference when thinking about the human body: the anatomical position. Nigel Palastanga, Derek Field, and Roger Soames describe the anatomical position as follows: "the body is standing erect and facing forwards; the legs are together with the feet parallel so that the toes point forwards; the arms hang loosely by the sides with the palm of the hand facing forward so that the thumb is lateral" (3). In assuming the "standing, erect, and facing forward" position as a constitutive posture of human physicality and, considering that gravity exerts an important force over bodies on the earth, verticality becomes a pattern/model of being and moving through space.

Although several dancer and choreographers have been concerned about the three-dimensional possibilities of body movement in space, the anatomical position remains a reference and a point of departure in written analysis and in corporeal training

disciplines. The laws of gravity contribute to the assumption of the vertical as the center weight. As Irmgard Bartenieff and Dori Lewis describe, "gravity exerts the downward, earth pull, and with its opposite, upward, skyward pull" (25) that helps to maintain the standing position. While the spatial configuration and possibilities of body movement in space have been challenged and explored, the relationship of body-center weight and its multiple possibilities of transfer in terms of aligned axes still needs further exploration as the training of the body's muscles and development of physical abilities to execute the movements in these axes can expand dancers' possibilities in their performances.

The principle of center-weight transfer, which I proposed during my work as a rehearsal director and dance instructor during the creation of the piece *Mulheres do Asé: Performance Ritual* with Edileusa Santos,[7] was anchored in the idea of exploring movement beyond this pattern of verticality by discovering—within the instability of being slightly outside this axis—new axes of "standing" position and motion. The feet are the first part of the body to experience the front, back, and lateral diagonal transfers I suggest, but during the practice, the attention is paid to the entire body. From the feet to the top of the head, the body's core acts as a fundamental connection and communication between the energy that emerges from the earth and the energy that leaves the body through the top of the head. Verticality is challenged, and it is in the negotiations of the body's muscles to maintain control over an oblique position—control that does not let the body collapse or change its main surface of contact, that forms the main part of this work.

[7] I developed this work with Edileusa Santos as part of my ethnography in 2016.

The central vertical axis becomes a point of passage rather than a point of permanence or static and safe balance.

This exploration out of the vertical axis also relates with a perception of verticality as a European pattern. Both Brenda Dixon Gottschild's text in *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar's creative process in "Batty Moves" (1994) reify this perception and put forth different responses to this hegemony in the West, the fruits of colonial expansion. As Gottschild explains, the "vertical aligned spine is the first principle of Europeanist dance" (8) which, according to the author, reflects a post-Renaissance, colonialist world view. Europe would be positioned as the erect controlling center, while every other continent would work as its arms and legs, as in ballet technique, thus being controlled and defined by the center. Gottschild uses the Africanist polycentrism and polyrhythm to highlight different perspectives and cosmologies. In terms of the distinct approach of the body, the author points to the "flexible bent-legged postures as a way to reaffirm contact with the earth" (8) in Africanist dances. In contrast, I look at the flexibility in terms of moving the body's alignment and axis from the center to oblique lines, which also tends to reinforce and restore the relationship with the earth. Yet, I also explain the connection with the energy located above the top of the head. This perspective embraces an understanding of spirituality worshipped through the body. In holding spiritual relevance, this practice calls attention to specificities of the context of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, which will be explored later in this dissertation. This spiritual relevance is related to but does not necessarily rely on a religious institution.

While Gottschild dedicates attention to flexibility in terms of the body's proximity to the earth and the multiple directions and different rhythms that body parts are able to take simultaneously from an Africanist perspective, Zollar's description of her creative process in "Batty Moves" calls attention to Africanist heritage in African American female contemporary bodies in terms of their tendency and option to move by delineating sinuous lines or drawing curves—with their hips, torsos, and shoulders—that touch axes that are parallel to the vertical. Ananya Chatterjea asserts that in this piece, Zollar "take[s] traditional moves from modern dance vocabulary and subtly transform[s] them by substituting the erect spine and aligned pelvis for more curved lines of the back" (454). In order to combine the three contrasting-aesthetics, she experienced in ballet, modern, and African dance classes, the choreographer focuses on not only the techniques but especially on the "butt/hip" movements of U.S. black women's quotidian ways of walking and "moving it." By observing black women in the supermarket and street, in her piece Zollar embodies the alternative undulations adopted by them.[8]

My corporeal proposal differs from` both Gottschild's and Zollar's ways of questioning European and Euro-American verticality. I graphically represent these three manners of re-imagining bodily alignment and possibilities of moving and "standing" as follows:

[8] Zollar's introduction of her piece in a presentation at the video from Urban Bush Women "Batty Moves."

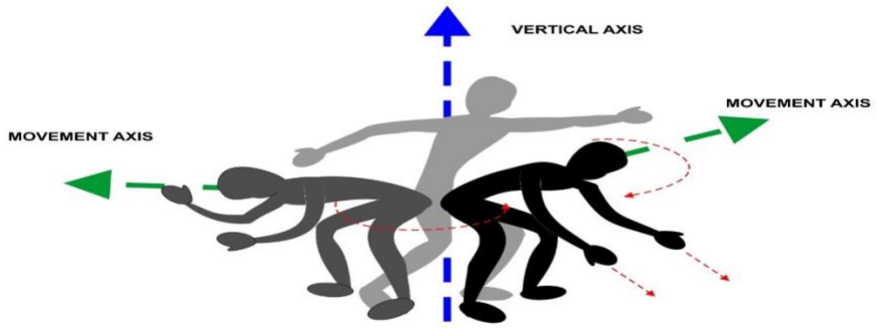
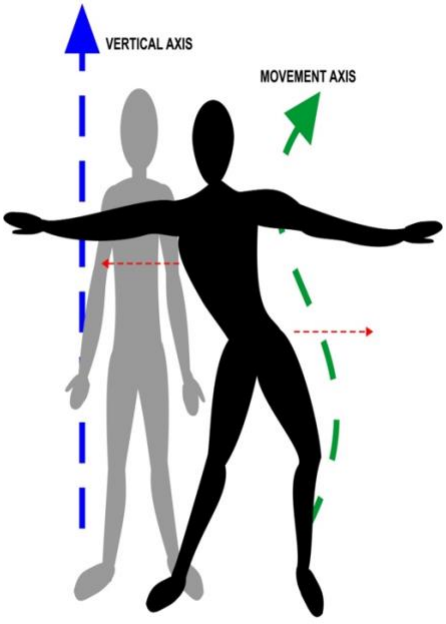


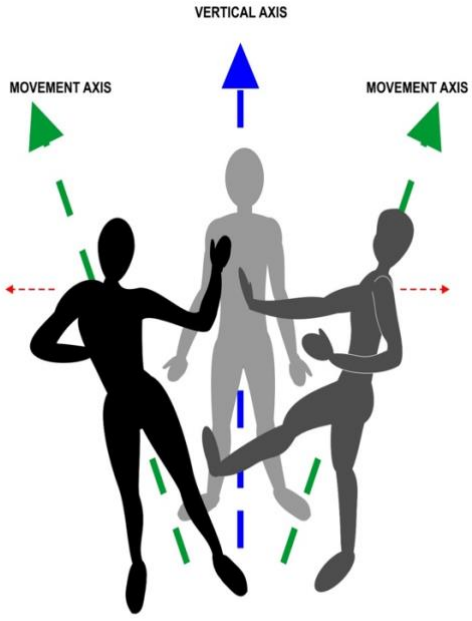
Figure 1. Gottschild's africanist aesthetics

Figure 1: Gottschild's Africanist Aesthetics



Zollar's curved lines

Figure 2: Zollar's Curved Lines



Agatha's alternative axis purpose

Figure 3: Agatha's Alternative Axes Purpose

While conducting and simultaneously experiencing the training, during the process of corporeal training of *Mulheres do Asé's* dancers in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, I

created a series of exercises divided into three moments: Orienting, Modulating, and Closing. Here I present a series of exercises that will illustrate how alternative axes manifest. I open the practice, the Orienting moment, by proposing the perception of the body in the vertical alignment to provide stimuli for a dynamic understanding of this pattern that will facilitate access to the challenging positions I propose later. I work with breath and internal focus as the reference for this perception. In a circle, the group is encouraged to think about this initial position as dynamic, even if there is no visible movement/motion happening. Their attention shifts to the body's fluids and energies emerging from the contact of their bare feet with the floor, passing through the body, and rising up to the space above the head. By focusing on the intense internal dynamic that keeps the body alive and in motion, body structures are understood to be in a state of constant activity. I also offer them the image of oppositional vectors of energy that keep their body structures working. While one vector points downward, linking feet, legs, and hips to the floor and grounding their center of gravity with the earth, the other vector points upward, linking the torso, neck, and top of the head with the energy over the body and creating a center of rising and slight mobility for the upper unity. The vertical axis from where we start our experience is enlivened by an exercise of self-perception, without closed eyes, but also without privileging the external gaze, neither from the other nor from a mirror. Concomitant to the center's internal awareness and minimal movements in oppositional directions, the body's core serves as a connector and allows the energies to keep flowing throughout the body. The power house[9] supports the

[9] In Pilates technique, the term "power house" is used to refer to the main muscles involved in supporting a

alignment of the body and prepares it to later support its alignment even when there is a dislocation or slight inclination of the body from the initial position.

The initial work of perceiving verticality and organizing skeleton, muscles, and fluids to maintain this alignment is followed by a moment I call Modulating, in which this axis is purposefully challenged. In a light progression, I start to conduct the bodies through the experience of transferring the weight to the toes, pushing the heels against the floor, and moving the top of the head to the center of the circle, without losing the alignment: heels, hips, shoulders, and head. The anterior muscles and the power house function by resisting gravity and allowing the body to support itself in that front-diagonal axis. The exercise does not propose a stop in that diagonal but rather an exploration of this front-diagonal dislocation and a return to the initial position, testing the limits of each physicality. By encouraging performers to take risks in relation to this limit of control slightly out of the vertical, the same practice offers the alternative of using one of the legs advancing in flexion to prevent the body from falling, when necessary. The exercise allows each individual's body to exceed its point of control or "fail" as part of the investigation of self-limits. The leg also helps the body to return to the vertical axis when it pushes the floor. The experience is repeated several times and later gains different layers when the direction changes. The transfer of weight to the heels and lateral surfaces of the foot asks for the engagement and activation of different muscles, and also enables the body to visit other diagonal axes.

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neutral postural alignment. These muscles lie deep under the skin's surface and include the transversus abdominis (TA), the lumbar multifidus, the diaphragm, and the muscles of the pelvic floor (Brooke 2000).

Although the aforementioned practice evolves to small and free-form sequences of movements that explore levels, horizontal positions in which the entire body is supported by the floor, and a visit to movement symbology borrowed from the quotidian gestural repertory of Candomblé[10], the initial and final exercises are crucial to the understanding of my proposal of challenging the body to deal with instability and unbalance. The coherence between the movement sequences is there, and all the exercises prepare the body to advance in its explorations and discoveries. Thus, the last exercise, or the Closing moment, is the one through which the bodies engage with the totality of the proposal: the moving body finding alternatives to deal with instability in its full potential. The last exercise suggests spatial dislocation as a consequence of the transfer of the body's center of weight without a permanent return to the vertical axis. Bodies transit from one diagonal axis to another and use the point of extreme engagement of the muscles to support that body in diagonal, or to use that limit as a moment of suspension. As the body is also dislocating through the space while out of its vertical axis, the moment of suspension works as a natural break to invert the direction of movement. The exercise consists of walking forward to the right front diagonal, returning to the center, passing through it, and taking a new direction to the left front diagonal, turning to the left back diagonal, returning to the center space, and taking the right back diagonal. Repetition makes the exercise cyclical and continuous. With about three beats to move forward and three beats to move backwards and cross the center, the main idea of this

[10] "(1) Religious tradition of worship of jeje-nagôs Orixás" (mine translation). "Tradição religiosa de culto aos orixás jeje-nagôs." (Lopes 63)

proposal is to use the transfer of the body's weight as the motif for dislocation in the space and its shifting as the propeller for the direction changes. Throughout the execution, each body takes bigger risks and engages with different strategies to avoid falling or remaining in its more comfortable axis, which is a natural tendency of the body used to move with the body-center weight in the vertical. The two proposed dislocations are: 1) dislocation through the space, and 2) dislocation of the body's axis.

In the training, each practice ended with a short moment of exchange: conversation and impressions about the experience, which gave me the opportunity to ripen ideas and understand how that proposal resonated with other performers. The feedback they provided was fundamental for my articulations, especially due to the fact that I was working in Salvador, with a group mostly composed of black female dancer-choreographer-educators who have over thirty years of lived experience with black dance, since they are all older than fifty. On November 17th, while talking about the Modulating moment and the proposal as a whole, I shared my interpretation of this experience as playing with instability and imbalance. Until that time, I thought about the experience as an exploration of the body's ability to adapt and create strategies to—while in a continuously moving state—maintain control even in imbalanced. At that moment, Santos, who was also participating in the practice, shared with the group her own perspective that questioned my use of the term "imbalance." Santos explained that she did not feel her body transitioning between positions of imbalance or dealing with the body's imbalance in itself. Rather, she felt she was playing with the limits of her body in terms of balance. In other words, she asserted that the balance was found in different

positions that could seem like positions of imbalance, but which were indeed positions in which she still remained in balance, even if exploring and playing with the "limit" of it. That comment came just as a clarification of an argument I was physically experiencing and theoretically trying to articulate for years, but now it had somehow gained a different and stronger meaning.

In light of Santos's observation, instead of understanding imbalance as a condition to which the body was adapting, I started to understand that the body becomes able to expand its own limits of balance while dealing with instability. Thus, I adapted my thinking and terminology in relation to Santos's comment by emphasizing that what I initially address as the finding of "control in imbalance" is in fact a finding of balance in between positions often experienced as positions of imbalance. The corporeal practice I suggest does not call upon the body to empower and prepare its physical structures to resist adapting to an offered situation by struggling to return to and stay in the straight line. In contradistinction, I encouraged them to resist finding places outside that straight line where they could stablish a dynamic stability, even if the condition was "non-stopping" or continuous movement. In learning how to live with that instability, these bodies push their own limits and use the outward push to create their own place of action, slightly beyond the universalized vertical axis or erect standing position that requires the engagement of other structures in order to become possible. As mentioned before, the continuous movement is a condition to move or act in between the created alternative axes. Creation and action within this dynamic stability open up a space for expression of individuality.

By transposing this understanding to another dimension, the physical training proposal works as a metaphor for a reflection on cultural and socio-political contexts, specifically to allow intellectual articulations in relation to the lived experience of black women in racist and sexist societies. Indeed, corporeal, cultural, and socio-political dimensions intersect and inform each other mutually. In this regard, if in a corporeal dimension alternative axes are described as oblique longitudinal lines established from a mainstream vertical axis where bodily stillness and motion are often assumed to be held, then in a cultural and socio-political dimension they are understood as strategies of action in society which do not necessarily disrupt mainstream, hegemonic structures but rather allow actions to enhance the implementation of non-dominant groups' "actions" itself.

BLACK FEMINISMS AND INSTABILITY: THE SOCIOPOLITICAL DIMENSION

The history of black women's experience of oppression and resistance within the African diaspora has provided constitutive elements to the multiple strands of black feminisms, its theorizations, and its practices. Each approach emphasizes different aspects of this tension, albeit all strands are generally concerned about social (in) justice, systematic denial of equal access to social resources, power structures, and strategies of survival and agency within racist and sexist contexts while, in several cases, also considering classist and homophobic environments. In *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred,* M. Jacqui Alexander, for instance, focuses on "multiple operations of power, of gendered and sexualized power that is simultaneously raced and classed" (4) and the effects of

imperialism. The author engages with what she calls "nodes of instability" to refer to several crises and practices that produce a hegemony of certain subjects and the criminalization, marginalization, and subordination of othered ones. With special attention paid to black women's experiences, as the author describes, the state's "institutions, knowledges, and practices stand at the intersection of global capital flows, militarization, nationalisms, and oppositional mobilization" (4). All these practices and ideologies are simultaneously products and producers of domination and hierarchy. In consequence, they also produce the nodes of instability that work to make invisible, silence, police, control, and exclude non-dominant groups from mainstream spaces of cultural and socio-political agency. Alexander provides several examples of nodes of instability:

> [h]eterosexuality's multiple anxieties manifested in the heterosexualization of welfare and the defense of marriage in the United States and the criminalization of lesbian and gay sex in Trinidad and Tobago and in the Bahamas; the consolidation of military-industrial-prison complex that both promotes the militarization of daily life and the most contemporaneous round of military aggression and war; the ideological production of various hegemonic identities: the soldier, the citizen patriot, the tourist, and the enemy on the part of state institutions and corporate capital; the integration of the corporate academy into the practices and institutions of the state at this moment of empire and therefore made integral to the machineries of war; Knowledge frameworks, particularly those that bolster and scaffold modernity's practices of violence that signify as democracy, such as cultural relativism; the global factory and its naturalization of immigrant women's labor; and the moments and places where apparently oppositional social locations and practices become rearticulated and appropriated in the interest of global capital as is the case of white gay tourism. (4-5)

All the examples Alexander provides demonstrate how the state operates not only directly but especially indirectly in the U.S., Trinidad and Tobago, and the Bahamas.

Although her main focus is on the U.S. and the Caribbean, Alexander acknowledges that these practices have affected black women as the main targets in a transnational dimension.

Alexander's perception of the effects of power, domination, and the state's ideologies and projects—nationalist, imperialist, capitalist, and modernist—in black women's lives offers an important reference for my interpretations of a material and immaterial systematic "pushing-out" from a "center line." Her engagement with the term nodes of instability relates directly to what I observe in the experience of black people and black women, especially when looking at the cultural, socio-political, and economic conditions forced upon these subjects throughout history. Moreover, it relates to my observations of the body's behavior and responses in secular and sacred expressions of dance. The nodes of instability work to unbalance, weaken, destabilize, and disarticulate these groups.

The specific nodes I emphasize here are related to gendered and racialized discourses and acts that emerge from nationalist and internationalist politics that rely on tourism and developmentalist[11] or progressivist discourses. I am particularly concerned about the effects of these discourses on the experience of black Brazilian women, in particular on the dancers-choreographers-educators who have created their artistic and

11 In "From Policy Frames to Discursive Politics: Feminist Approaches to Development Policy and Planning in an Era of Globalization," Mary Hawkesworth asserts that "in addition to consolidating a geopolitical regime that accredits capitalism as the only alternative, development policy and planning produce naturalize hierarchies of gender, race, and class even as they deploy a rhetoric of progress that proclaims development itself the remedy to such archaic forms of inequality" (115).

socio-political identities "in transit." I understand this ongoing creation of identities "in transit" according to Stuart Hall's perception of cultural identities as the result of an African diasporic dynamic in which hybrid and syncretic identities can dwell simultaneously in diverse places. By considering the "inter-space" between Brazil and the U.S. or, more specifically, between Salvador, Bahia, and several cities in the U.S., I engage with aspects related to Brazil and the U.S. as part of a transnational African diaspora by avoiding the isolation of these spaces. In other words, my interest lies in the specificities found in this route.

Instability also informs this perception of dancers' lives and artistic careers that are not fixed in a specific space, even if a strong connection with one of these spaces is apparent in their dancing. It has been their mobility and ability to circulate through diasporic routes while experiencing relationships with more than one nation-state, tourist industry, racial politics, culture, art, and academy that stands out here. The dancer-choreographer-educators I examine in this dissertation do not exist outside of these nodes. Rather, they live under and negotiate with the possibilities they find to resist and operate within these unstable territories. However, they also use these forces that push them to be identified in a group that is usually categorized as different, exotic, and less developed to propel themselves to produce/act, passing through the mainstream line and creating their own alternative axes of action, which does not fix or encapsulate them under established classifications or stereotypes. In other words, their creation of alternative lines between where they perform allows them to express their individuality and be active without making efforts to belong or follow the rules imposed by a dominant

system. The *alternative axes of action* become fundamental to their creations and elaborations not to be limited to the images others create about them, instead determining, through their works, their own paths and ways of acting associated with the creation of a questionable image/representation.

Regarding the importance of the nodes of instability as factors through which dominant systems operate and destabilize black subjects as discussed by Alexander, I advocate for an understanding of the other side of these same nodes of instability. I argue that the nodes of instability also work as a potential stimulus for re-creation and re-stabilization of those who are mostly impacted by their disturbing effects. In other words, I contend that in light of the unfavorable conditions imposed by the forces of hegemony, black women—instead of retreating and accepting or adapting to the "margin" as their place to stand in—use that instability to empower themselves to find new ways to operate as active individuals and collectives. By affirming this, I do not intend to construct or interpret oppression as necessary or as a "good thing for these subjects," but I do aim to highlight the creative and practical ability of black subjects to revert situations and meanings; the varied tools used to dismantle them can then be transformed into tools with ambiguous or double meanings and also serve as motifs for action, thus producing opposing or controversial effects. And this reversion is not a simple "use of the master's tool" as an attempt to "dismantle the master's house" (Lorde 98), because as Audre Lorde asserts, "when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy […] it means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable" (98). Instead, this reversion is used to propel creativity and black women's

development of new abilities.

ALTERNATIVE AXES: STRATEGIES FOR SELF-AFFIRMATIVE ACTIONS

The reverting attitudes I mention in the previous section of this chapter have been already observed throughout history in the cultural dimension as well. The Brazilian scholar Muniz Sodré, for instance, demonstrates in his work *A Verdade Seduzida: Por um Conceito de Cultura no Brasil* (The Seduced Truth: For a Concept of Culture in Brazil), how black subjects in Brazil were able to create "parallel forms" of social organization even during slavery. The author emphasizes the importance of the *Nagôs,*[12] especially in Bahia, in the "reimplementation of basic elements of their symbolic organization of origin," which was in south and central Dahomey and southeast Nigeria ("A Verdade Seduzida" 121). According to the author, neither the weapons and efforts by the state to break/disarticulate black people's economic, political, familiar, and mythic ways of life, nor the torture and physical aggressions committed during slavery prevented their actions and re-creations. As the author asserts:

> Nowadays, it is well known that in the midst of slavery—with its demoralizing corporeal punishments, its bloody military interventions, its tactics of ideological assimilation and cooptation (concessions of small privileges, opportunities for social advancement for mestizos, etc.)—the blacks developed *parallel forms* of social organization. Examples: of an economic order—savings banks for the purchase of emancipation letters for urban slaves; of a "political" order—proper deliberative councils to settle internal disputes of a nation or ethnic group, or for

[12] According to Sodré, "the Nagôs were the last African groups that established themselves in Brazil between the late 18th and early 19th centuries […] the Nagôs re-implemented here [in Brazil] – with larger extension and bigger structural reaching in Bahia – the basic elements of their original symbolic organization" (119-121; translation mine). "Os Nagôs foram os últimos grupos africanos a se estabelecerem no Brasil, entre o fim do século XVIII e início do século XIX. […] os nagôs conseguiram reimplantar aqui – de modo mais extenso na Bahia – os elementos básicos de sua organização simbólica de origem" (119-121).

> the preparation of collective actions (escapes or revolts) or mutual confraternities under the cover of (Christian) religious activities; of a mythical order—the elaboration of a representative synthesis of the vast pantheon of African cosmic gods or entities (the Orixás), as well as the preservation of the cult of the ancestors (the Eguns) and the continuity of original forms of relationship and kinship; of a linguistic order—the maintenance of Yoruba as a ritualistic language.[13] (121; translation mine)

Sodré uses these various examples as evidence of powerful strategies which blacks engaged with in order to keep their memories, history, and traditions alive. The author cites the existence of two cultural orders in the same space—or the creation of strategies by blacks to re-elaborate cultural values under or "in parallel" to the values and norms implemented by dominant groups in Brazil—as a kind of "double-play" between white and black cultural orders, whereby black culture operated as a "permanent source of resistance to devices of domination and maintainer of the effective balance of a black element in Brazil" ("A Verdade Seduzida" 123). By understanding this "resistance to devices of domination" as a stimulus for reinvention within different realities, it becomes possible to understand alternative axes of action as spaces/forms of resistance that are not parallel to the mainstream axis, but instead are oblique and dynamic. These axes are generated at the same starting point but take different directions from the vertical axis and are multiple. By passing through the vertical axis and navigating between various

13 "Hoje se sabe que, em plena vigência da escravatura – com seus desmoralizantes castigos corporais, suas sangrentas intervenções armadas, suas táticas de assimilação e cooptação ideológicas (concessões de pequenos privilégios, oportunidades de ascensão social para os mestiços, etc.) – os negros desenvolviam *formas paralelas* de organização social. Exemplos: de ordem econômica – caixas de poupança para compras de alforrias de escravos urbanos; de ordem 'política' – conselhos deliberativos próprios para dirimir disputas internas de uma nação ou etnia, ou para a preparação de ações coletivas (fugas, revoltas) ou então confrarias de assistência mútua sob a capa de atividades religiosas (cristãs); de ordem mítica - a elaboração de uma síntese representativa do vasto panteão de deuses ou entidade cósmicas africanas (os orixás), assim como a preservação do culto dos ancestrais (os *eguns)* e a cotinuidade de modos originais de relacionamento e de parentesco; de ordem linguística – a manutenção do iorubá como língua ritualística" (121).

(created) oblique axes, action becomes possible.

This perspective is fundamental to the interpretation of certain actions in the political dimension as well. The primary inspiration for thinking about these alternatives of action comes from my observation and curiosity about the particularities of black Brazilian feminisms and feminists which I understand as distinctive responses to the instability they face. One response I consider to be a general feature in black Brazilian feminisms, and also in the practice of black female dancer-choreographers in Brazil, is the connection with African-derived spirituality. As mentioned before in this chapter, the process of black consciousness and identity affirmation was an important step for the black Brazilian social movement as well as for black feminisms and black artists (Gonzalez; Payne and Rufino; Nascimento in Santiago and Monteiro). Afro-Brazilian spiritual practices provide a contact with African heritage and a revival of a type of memory that speaks to many people in Brazil, especially blacks. This connection goes beyond religious rituals and the connection with the divine and ancestors, enabling the full expression of identity and the strength of community. One such example is given by Sodré in *O Terreiro e a Cidade*:

> The *terreiro* (of Candomblé) appears as the black Brazilian social form par excellence, because in addition to the existential and cultural diversity that it engenders, it is a place which originates strength or social power for an ethnicity that experiences citizenship in unequal conditions. Through the *terreiro* and its originality within the European space, strong traces of the historical subjectivity of the subaltern classes in Brazil are obtained.[14](19; translation mine)

[14] "o *terreiro* (de Candomblé) afigura-se como a forma social negro-brasileira por excelência, porque além da diversidade existencial e cultural que engendra, é um lugar originário de força ou potência social para uma etnia que experimenta a cidadania em condições desiguais. Através do terreiro e de sua originalidade diante do espaço europeu, obtêm-se traços fortes da subjetividade histórica das classes subalternas no Brasil" (Sodré 19).

The importance of this space for black people in Brazil is not only related to the history of this space as a demonstration of resistance to the attempts to erase memory and history, but also (and especially) to black subjectivity and identities. These spaces become one of the most important sources of inspiration for different forms of black social, political, cultural, and artistic expressions. Similarly, this space was one source of inspiration for my theorizing in this study, as I will reveal later in this section.

Another particular characteristic I identify in black Brazilian feminisms is precisely the creation of alternative ways for black women to achieve their space in society and move within it, and to recreate these alternatives in a political context as well. Lélia Gonzalez's ways of making politics is an example of both connecting with African-derived spirituality and creating alternative ways of operating. Her texts and initiatives during the 1980s were remarkable for black women who worked with her and who came after her. The creations I illustrate here are related to what Luiza Bairros emphasizes as innovations in the text "Relembrando Lélia Gonzales" (Remembering Lélia Gonzalez). Bairros calls attention to the way Gonzalez used to speak, write, and make politics within a white male-dominated sociopolitical and limited context. Gonzalez had developed her own way of demonstrating that culture is political, creating ways of communicating with blacks while awakening their consciousness about their importance as subjects of their own history and in the process of formation of Brazil (Gonzalez in Bairros). Alongside the use of what Gonzalez called "*pretoguês*[15]," a language whose text structures and

15 This is a portmanteau of the words *preto* (black) and *português* (Portuguese).

vocabulary draws from popular expressions and words used by "black women working in white people's houses" (she refers to enslaved women working in the master's homes and to black women who work as nannies, cooks, and housemaids in white homes) (35). Gonzalez was also unique in the way she made politics. While she was a federal legislative candidate for the Workers' Party in Rio de Janeiro in 1988, Gonzalez became remarkable for her specific way of advertising her candidacy. Her public discourses were full of surprises. Several times, instead of delivering a regular speech, Gonzalez just sang *samba* songs with lyrics that had important meaning and communicated easily with the people she wanted to represent (Bairros 4). She believed that black *samba* composers could better identify with and "interpret the feelings and expectations of black people" (4) through their music.

Moreover, Gonzalez's connection with Candomblé communities and philosophy were fundamental to her process of self-affirmation and actions as a black woman. This connection was reflected in her way of making politics. On one occasion, Gonzalez organized a march that was remembered for the yellow roses each participant held in their hands while walking (Bairros 8). The roses were in honor of Oxum, an Orixá who represents the power of women, water, and fecundity. A yellow river filled the streets, something that had never been seen before in political advertisements or candidacy until that time. By innovating in the way she made politics, Gonzalez became even more important to understanding the complexity of the African diaspora's multiple contributions to contesting and resisting domination.

In their interpretations of Brazilian cultural formation and political interventions,

both Sodré and Gonzalez indicated the alternatives imagined and executed by black people in Brazil, not necessarily to confront with restrictive, limited systems but rather to deal or negotiate with them; systems that were not created to provide equal opportunity for everyone but systems based on inequality in sociopolitical and economic terms. The indications offered by these authors are read here not exactly as parallel to the existing imposed ones presented by the dominant systems, but as oblique to them. These axes originate at the same starting point but take different directions. In addition, continuous movement is a specific condition that these alternative axes embrace in order to enable the human body to reach them. A body cannot fix itself along one of the axes. Instead, it must move in between these axial possibilities, including the vertical axis as a line through which the body passes, but not treating it as the main axis of action. It is fundamental to observe that the examples of ways of action indicated by Sodré and Gonzalez did not become models for other individuals or groups; they were not established as strategies that were repeated throughout the history. Despite the fact that inclusion, belonging, and participation in mainstream social, political, and cultural system have been part of the discourses and efforts of marginalized groups throughout history, I observe that this is not the unique strategy engaged by black subjects. In my perspective, black subjects and black feminists are also adopting other/alternative strategies; transforming and discovering new ways to continue acting outside of mainstream norms. They are continually moving to survive as active sociopolitical subjects and to create their own axes and manners of action.

Despite the fact that alternatives have been observed in cultural and political

dimensions, their creations are also observed at the corporeal level. Indeed, it was while watching the performances of *Boiadeiros*, *Caboclos*, and *Marujos* in a Candomblé *terreiro* (Ilê Omiojuaro, in Rio de Janeiro) in 2009 that I awoke to the body's possibility of reaching and moving through oblique axes of alignment. On that occasion, although I had been a practitioner in that *terreiro* for about one year, I went to the *Festa de Boiadeiro* (*Boiadeiro* celebration) as a dancer-researcher investigating the matrices of movements related to the different strands of samba dance. As I mentioned before, *Boiadeiros, Caboclos*, and *Marujos* are Brazilian entities worshiped in Afro-Brazilian religions—Candomblé and Umbanda—revealing that the process of "acculturation of indigenous [people] and Africans from Angola" (Ribeiro 61) in Brazil occurred not only in secular but also sacred spaces. In Bahian *terreiros*, this specific festivity known as "Candomblé de Caboclo" or "Festa de Boiadeiro," honors these entities (Caboclo—an indigenous figure who lived in a mythical time, before the colonizers arrived in Brazil; *Boiadeiro* – a drover from northeastern Brazil; and *Marujo*—a sailor) and differs completely from the rituals and public celebrations for the Orixás (Nunes and Moura 41). Songs are sung in Portuguese instead of Yoruba, and the celebration is usually held outside of the main salon (*barracão)* in open space close to the trees. The entities establish a direct relationship with the "visitors" by talking with them and offering *jurema* (a traditional drink extracted from the leaves of *Mimosa tenuiflora*); the entities often drink wine and/or beer, and they also smoke cigars. The space is decorated with fruits, leaves, and Brazilian flags. This much less formal environment than the one created in Orixás' celebrations called my attention, but the most significant elements that

impressed me were the entities' moving bodies.

Both the process of incorporation of the entities and their performances involved an engagement with unusual postures and ways of transferring weight that transgress normal perceptions of balance, body alignments, and ways of moving. The moment of incorporation provoked in most of the bodies sudden and abrupt flexions and extensions of the spine, displacements evoked by the sudden movements, and changes of direction. Incorporation or possession usually occurs during the ritual that involves the drums (*atabaques),* when the Candomblé practitioner have at least three years of initiation as an *Iawo*, the "son or daughter of the saints or orixás" (Daniel 31) whose body serves as a "horse" for the divine manifestation or "riding." During this process, it is common to see the ones who are incorporating their entity be supported by others (usually the *ekedis*[16]*)* in order to keep themselves upright, which is a mark of an almost "out of control" imbalance. The bodies appear to be pushed by a strong and fast external force. In contrast, when the entity finally possesses the body, the body incorporates the entity, the movement of the spine and changes of direction do not change much in terms of range and trajectory, but they are executed with a slow and condensed quality. The body never stops moving and the sensation of imbalance is still present for those who are watching them walk around, stand in place, or dance. The imbalance in this case is different because the physicality demonstrates an inexplicable control of the body and a well-developed ability to avoid falling, even while unbalanced. Weight is transferred such that

[16] Ekedi – "Female helper of the small mothers. The ekedis are not possessed by the entities but they have authority over them." (Estudo da Umbanda, Wordpress) https://estudodaumbanda.wordpress.com/2008/08/01/pequeno-dicionario-de-umbanda/.

the whole body moves from the center or a vertical line to walk half forward, half sideways, moving along the diagonal while the hips remain facing forward. It is a kind of crossing walk, in which the knees are lifted high and the sensation is one of floating or walking on eggshells. The weight is also unusually transferred in different ways while dancing, since each *Caboclo*, *Boiadeiro*, or *Marujo* has its own way of moving and dancing. For those who are watching these entities' performances, it seems that there is an external force that often pushes the body from one unbalanced position to another. It is in these transitions between unbalanced states that the body is able to dance, move, and recreate its own balance. The vertical line is just a passage that rarely becomes a point of stability where these bodies stand for long periods of time.

In the secular space, I observe that that same playing with instability—bodily and social—characterizes a singular dancing, singing, playing and resisting. The dance space served also as a place for internal communication through the lyrics and articulation of strategies to operate under oppressive and restrictive systems. As Sodré observes, in Brazil, the Portuguese colonizers not only allowed but also encouraged festivities and traditional secular rituals of the blacks because they believed these would serve as a "relaxing" moment, while also accentuating ethnic differences. However, it was in this "allowed space" that blacks redeveloped their traditions and a community of strength ("A Verdade Seduzida" 124). The *samba de roda* (circle samba) of the Bahian "Recôncavo" region, for instance, plays with the body movements, language, and the system to act in

the interstices.[17] It is in the questioning of the vertical straight line that these people move throughout the space and construct individuality and collectivity in their dancing and lived experiences. They develop a singular corporeality and a potential to resist socio-political adversities.

THE UNITY OF THE MOVING-BODY-SELF: EXISTENTIAL PHYSICALITY AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

I move my hands while I am speaking to show Exú that I am alive.

- Iyá Beata de Iyemonjá, Interview at RJ -TV show -

The principle of the body in motion as a sign of existence is fundamental to African-derived cosmologies. Throughout the almost nine years as a Candomblé practitioner at Ilê Omiojuaro, a *terreiro* led by the priestess Iyalorixá Beata de Iyemonjá until her passing in May 2017, I have perceived the importance of the body and movement in this religion and culture. Although Exú is the Orixá who best represents this idea, since he is the Orixá of the crossroads, the one who facilitates communication and brings dialectic dynamics to life, this premise is a characteristic that permeates communities' beliefs and habits in general. Movement, or the moving body, is the main manifestation of life, and for the ones who follow this philosophy, it is fundamental to show this in different situations and ways within their spiritual practices and the everyday

[17] This assertion is based on literature review and participant observation in workshops and community events during my Master's in Science of Art, 2011–2013.

customs of their communities. Either the human body or the possessed body will engage in practices to demonstrate this premise. While practitioners or community members move their torso from side to side while crossing train tracks to demonstrate to Ogum that they are alive, or clap their hands in the *paó,* gesture of clapping hands in specific rhythm and times, as part of the rituals to show the divinities the devotion of their own bodies in name of the Orixás, the Orixás rarely stop moving when they manifest through the Iawo's body. In the *barracão,* for example, when they are not dancing in the center of the space, it is common to see them walking from side to side or twisting their torso in a longitudinal line, a movement that promotes a lifting of the soles of the feet from the floor and a discrete transfer of weight from one foot to the other. These are all modes of demonstrations of life, existence, and presence.

The statement above, given by Iyá Beata de Iyemonjá during a television interview in Brazil 2010, is not a simple translation of her remarkable gestures of hands with opened fingers that vibrate; gestures that she engages in while speaking. These movements are meaningful and hold important value for Afro-Brazilian communities. This philosophical thought clearly contrasts with the idea that became the guideline for humanist theory across the Western continent during the Enlightenment: "I think, therefore I am." In this regard, Cartesian thought—along with the ideas of rationalists such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, who associated human existence with the "mind" and not with the body—fails. The version "I move therefore I am" carries much more significance for Nagô-Yoruba communities and consequently for black people influenced by these cultures.

In understanding continuous movement as an existential condition of the individual, the body is always imagined as a corpus in motion, or as a moving body. It is not possible to imagine an immobile body or a body without movement. Yet, it is important to understand that there are variations in the range and intensity of movements, and that both internal and external movements are considered part of the moving-body composition. To further express this, I borrow from Irmigard Bartenieff and Dori Lewis, two body movement researchers and professionals who studied with Rudolph Laban and later developed their own methods and techniques to improve the human body's function and communication through bodily training:

> Even in apparent stillness, movement variables are active. Nowhere is this more discernible than in the movements of the human body as they fluctuate between stability and mobility. Movement variables enable us to cope with our temperaments and our environment in order to survive. Only in death, perhaps, does the experience of movement cease. (xii)

The examples I offered earlier of Nagôs and Yorubas, unlike the example given by Bartenieff and Lewis, give emphasis to visible and *apparent* movement. If on the one hand the variables they illustrate are also in Nagô and Yoruba notions of the moving body, which means that their practices, everyday movements, and rituals consist of moments of suspension, breaks, or "apparent stillness," without which the dynamic could not exist, on the other hand the importance of making that body appear to be "moving" characterizes a particularity related to that black culture that is unreadable and unacceptable for Western dancer-researchers like Laban. Laban had a racist vision of what black bodies could and could not to do, especially when referring to their movement

as an art form.[18] It certainly informed the way of reading movement and bodies in the system of movement analysis he created and in his successors' perspectives. That is why it is fundamental to offer non-Western perspective, understandings, and languages to discuss movement. Through the illustrative reference of the pendular movement it is possible to comprehend that the break allows the body to find the impulse to revert the movement and move in a different direction. It is the fluctuation between stability and mobility that enables the human body to move; this dialectic interdependent-double is part of black Brazilian dance expressions and their cultural dynamic as well. As Fred Moten reveals, in the experience of black people within the African diaspora, the "break" becomes a necessary space for recreations and improvisations which make possible the active and dynamic existence of these people.

Although research around the understanding of body-mind-spirit connection has increased over time, remnants of the Western fragmented and compartmentalized human being are still present in the social imaginary, especially in places dominated by rationalist and Christian perspectives. This perception also informs the basis of racism, sexism, and other modes of discrimination. Ann Cooper Albright, for instance, calls attention to Black feminists' demonstrations of "how pervasive the separation of body and mind is in our culture" (6). The process of separation between the self and the body

[18] In *A Life for Dance* Laban expresses his belief in the superiority of European dance aesthetics over African dance aesthetics by asserting: "I doubt whether the Negro is capable of inventing any dance at all. If one hopes to find any kind of Negro dance culture here, one is in for a big disappointment. A gift for dance invention as well as the higher development of the other arts and sciences seems to be the privilege of other races. The Negro adopts our stand-up collar and top hat, and uses them grotesquely, remodeled to fit his own feeling. Where music is concerned he seems to possess an inborn talent, but only for rhythmic, melodic, unsophisticated expression" (Laban 133).

reflects a misogynistic disembodiment of the universal subject. “From this belief that the body is Other, it is not a far leap to the conclusion that others are their bodies” (Butler 133). Judith Butler notes not only the process of othering women by the understanding of these subjects as essentially more related to the material body but also read this as a fundament to discourses on a “superior” rational man.

Maria Rita Kehl, also offers a reflection on this common universal separation between the I/self and the physical body. The author observes that around the world, people use the verbal expression for “my body” or the equivalent in their language to refer to the physical or material body. In doing so, they demonstrate how the I/self has been understood as a controlling entity that is different and separated from the body, the psyche, the consciousness, etc. This I/self becomes the thing that possesses the other components of a human being, instead of being and becoming part of the same unity. In contrast, Kehl argues that the I/self “can only exist inside the corporeal entity” (110). Consequently, the body and its abilities receive less attention and are considered parts of the human being that can be disciplined, educated, manipulated, explored, and consumed by its “hierarchically” more powerful “mind” or “I/self.”

While theorists such as Lacan, Aristotles, and Descartes develop arguments to prove that the “I,” which produces image of itself, thought, and speech, is in fact separated from and hierarchically superior to the body, Kehl reveals that the body produces and holds a sense of existential continuity that is supported by its own memory. As the author asserts, “the sense of existential continuity is supported by a body’s memory […] the body remembers who he/she/it is and this corporeal memory is more

important than the mental one […] It is the corporeal knowledge that consolidates the relationship between the I and the body" (112). Kehl points to a fundamental meaning that the body has always had for African- and indigenous-derived peoples. The memory inscribed onto the body was and still is an essential element of resistance, the sense that although the material body has been disciplined, tortured, and consumed during the process of colonization and exploitation as commodities until the present day, it also carries an embodied knowledge that "due to its insignificance [for dominant groups] was not surveilled or punished"[19] (Montes 127). It is interesting to reflect on how meaningful the simple quotidian corporeal memories were for blacks and indigenous peoples. Maria Lucia Montes (2005) uses the examples of "a way of walking or siting down, holding a plow or chisel, a rhythm of speech, the sense of rhythm while moving the body to the sound of the drums, the rough taste of pepper or the palm oil in the food"[20] (127) to demonstrate that through these simple bodily gestures and culturally/traditionally created and cultivated habits, black and indigenous moving bodies kept their history and cosmologies alive as part of what Diana Taylor calls the repertoire.[21]

Choreographies and dance methodologies developed by "politically engaged" (Lima) black artists in Brazil have enlightened the memory of the moving body–and I/self's as the main element in the process of self-affirmation and empowerment. The moving-body-self unity is a central feature in the work of Santos and Silvestre, as I argue

[19] "restava-lhes a memória inscrita no corpo, que por sua insignificância mesma jamais se cuidou de vigiar ou punir" (127).
[20] "um modo de andar e sentar, de segurar um arado ou um cinzel, um reitmo da fala, o sentido do ritmo a mover o corpo no toque do tambor, o gusto áspero da pimento ou do dendê na comida" (127).
[21] In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor refers to the repertoire as an "ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)" (19).

and demonstrate in Chapter 2. It is through their creations that these dancer-choreographer-educators have constructed their artistic identities with individual details and qualities, but which communicate collectively as well. Moreover, it is through the redevelopment of lines of action that they have nourished and are being nourished by black women's lived experiences in the African diaspora.

In this dissertation I employ a combination of the following methodological procedures: close readings of live performances and recording of choreographies; analyses of dance methodologies through participant observation and embodied practice; archival research; and interviews. In the following paragraphs, I offer an explanation of how each of these procedures were employed in order to contribute to this dissertation. This explanation will provide clarification to the reader about the research process conducted during five months spent in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil (August–December 2016) and two weeks spent in New York, New York, U.S. (March 2017). Both dancer-choreographer-educators are aware of this project and agreed to collaborate with this research by providing access to their classes, rehearsals, personal archives, and giving interviews.

As mentioned at the start of this introduction, my experience as a black woman, heterosexual, and middle-class dancer-researcher born and raised in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, who personally knew the main subjects and interviewees in this work, contributed significantly to my ability to gain access to information and people in this research. In addition, the fact that I worked with Dance Brazil for ten years (1997–2007) and studied at UFBA Dance School between 1994 and 2001 just like Silvestre and Santos was key to

my analysis of interviews and texts about these spaces because my embodied knowledge of this dance company and institution allowed me to add the layer created with basis on personal impressions in my analysis.

By employing close readings of selected pieces created by Silvestre and Santos, I could have a better understanding of how Silvestre and Santos's choreographies intervened in the history of Dance Brazil, Balé Folclórico da Bahia, and the field of dance in Salvador and the U.S. The pieces analyzed here are the ones to which I had access attending to live performances and watching video recordings. There are a few I had performed. In my process of digging into the archive, I noticed a particular difficulty in the practice of archiving dance and making these archives accessible. In several cases neither the choreographers nor the dance companies' directors had any archival record of certain pieces. Due to this limited access to the artists' productions, my analysis borrows from primary and secondary sources such as previous writings about the artists, dance reviews, documentaries, and films, as well as excerpts from visual recordings of their choreographies and classes. The pieces here analyzed are: *Mulheres do Asé: Performance Ritual* (Santos 2016); *Quilombos* (Santos 1996); *Serra Pelada* (Santos 1998); *Camará* (Santos1998) and *Ginga* (Santos 2000); *Afixirê* (Silvestre 1994); *Fêmeas* (Silvestre 1994); *Ginga* (Silvestre 2000); *Mo Ifé: Love Stories* (Silvestre 2006); *Alaafia/Harmony* (Silvestre 2010).

I had access to videos of selected dance pieces, programs, and newspaper reviews through archival research. I also visited Silvestre's and Santos's personal archives in Salvador, Bahia. The visits to their personal archives took place in the months of August

(Silvestre) and September to December (Santos) 2016. Moreover, I accessed materials about Silvestre's and Santos's works through an interview and visit to Jelon Vieira, Parry Brian (executive director of the company), and the Dance Brazil archives in New York, New York, in March 2017.

Participant observation of the Silvestre intensive program and workshop and working as the rehearsal director and assistant during Santos's creation of *Mulheres do Asé: Performance Ritual* enriched my analysis. I participated in the Silvestre Technique training program in Salvador between August 1st and 19th, Monday to Friday, three hours a day at the dance school of the *Fundação Cultural da Bahia* in Salvador, and in the planning and preparation of community dance workshops which took place between April 27th and 29th, 2018 in Austin, Texas. Between September and December, 2016, I worked as rehearsal director with Edileusa Santos in the creation of *Mulheres do Asé*, participating actively at the rehearsals – Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6pm to 9pm. The premier was November 28th and the last meeting I participated was in December 1st. While taking the classes and working in the rehearsals, I conducted interviews with Silvestre, Santos, their students, and five professional dancers/musicians who work in collaboration with them.

This dissertation will explore the contributions of the work of black Brazilian female choreographers in the African diaspora through this introduction, three body chapters, and a conclusion. Alongside this introductory chapter in which I describe my process of developing alternative axes of action, a concept I propose which is inspired by M. Jacqui Alexander's notion of "nodes of instability," my corporeal experiences of

playing with instability, and black feminist articulations of systems of oppression and black women's responses to them, I present a chapter – Chapter 2 - on the role played by Silvestre and Santos in the history of dance in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, and the expansion of their work in the U.S. In Chapter 3 I discuss the methodologies of these dancer-choreographer-educators, and finally, in Chapter 4 I look at some of their choreographies. I conclude this dissertation by describing how Silvestre's and Santos's work have marked my practice and how I have incorporated the concept of alternative axes of action in my methodology and pedagogy. In addition, I speculate how a dancer-choreographer-educator from Guadaloupe, Léna Blou, may be engaging the principle of instability in her work, illuminating the forging of a black feminist dance diaspora.

Chapter 2, Edileusa Santos's and Rosangela Silvestre's Interventions Upon the History of Dance in Bahia: From Salvador to The World, focuses on the participation of these dancer-choreographer-educators in the history of dance in Brazil, looking especially at Silvestre's and Santos's passage through the Federal University of Bahia Dance School and their actions within that institution. I emphasize Santos's permanence as a staff member within the UFBA Dance School and her creation of an alternative route to the expression of student identities, exchange with the cultural environment and artists, and adaptations made to the curriculum. Moreover, I interpret Silvestre's choice to leave the UFBA Dance School and spend her time working between Brazil and the U.S. as an action contributing to the forging of a black dance diaspora. The work of both Santos and Silvestre in Dance Brazil is also addressed here, which allows me to examine dancer-

choreographer-educators' migrations and the global expansion of Bahian dance and dancers.

In Chapter 3, *Terreiro* Corporealities and Dance Methodologies: Suggesting Alternative Movement Grammar/Language, I analyze *Técnica Silvestre* or Silvestre Technique and *Dança de Expressão Negra* or Dance of Black Expression as alternative dance methodologies developed by Silvestre and Santos, respectively. The Candomblé cosmology and the *terreiro* territory and community are examined in this chapter as the primary references for Silvestre's and Santos's dancing, providing fundamental premises for their explorations of the dancing body in their practices. It is also important to understand the work of these dancer-choreographer-educators in relation to aspects observed in black feminists' thoughts and actions. It should be noted that during my ethnography I had more access to Silvestre's methodology and pedagogy than I had to her choreographies. In contrast, with Santos, for most of the time I worked with her, she was dedicated to the creation of her most recent choreography and was not teaching during that period. Thus, most of this chapter which analyzes their methodologies focuses on Silvestre's work as a reflection of what I experienced during the ethnography.

Chapter 4, Choreographing Brazil: Moving in Other Directions, encompasses the analysis of several pieces composed by Santos and Silvestre. I open the chapter by looking at Santos's most recent piece, *Mulheres do Asé*, and the importance of this choreography to the black women who perform this piece and black women linked to Afro-Brazilian religions and culture. I also look at Santos's choreographies with Dance Brazil and Silvestre's creations with Balé Folclórico da Bahia and Viver Bahia. The

difficulty in accessing video recordings of Silvestre's piece limited my ability to analyze many of her creations, which is reflected in my greater focus on Santos's work compared to that of Silvestre.

In Chapter 5, A Transnational Playing with Instability, I use my own experience at the 2018 Collegium for African Diaspora Dance Conference to reflect on aspects of Silvestre's and Santos's work I have embraced. I also look at the diagram and corporeal training, the playing with instability recreating balance, as starting points for my demonstration of how I have worked with alternative axes o action in my own practice and for speculations about African diasporic connections.

Chapter 2: Edileusa Santos's and Rosangela Silvestre's Interventions Upon the History of Dance in Bahia, Brazil – From Salvador to the World

PROLOGUE [22]

On June 14, 2016, at the Espaço Itaú de Cinema – Glauber Rocha, Salvador's dance community was captivated by the premiere of a documentary film honoring Raimundo Bispo de Souza, better known as Mestre King (1943–2017). *Raimundos: Mestre King e as Figuras Masculinas da Dança na Bahia* (*Raimundos: Mestre King and The Masculine Figures of Dance in Bahia*), directed by dancer and choreographer Bruno de Jesus, was created as part of a city-wide commemoration of fifty years of Mestre King's work. Acknowledged as a pioneer in the research and development of an Afro-Bahian modern dance style, Mestre King was the first man to enroll in the Federal University of Bahia Dance School (UFBA Dance School) in 1972. After graduating in 1976, Mestre King dedicated his life to teaching, choreographing, and performing outside academia, developing a consistent body of work at SESC (Serviço Social do Comércio [Commercial Social Service]), the Duque de Caxias and Severino Vieira public elementary schools, and at the Escola de Dança da Fundação Cultural do Estado da Bahia (FUNCEB) Dance School of the Cultural Foundation of the State of Bahia; he also taught

[22] In this prologue I use the experiences I had immediately after returning to Salvador for my doctoral research ethnography in 2016 to emphasize the relevance of this dissertation on Rosangela Silvestre's and Edileusa Santos's works. The privilege of men in the narratives I describe present specific justifications for that, but at some point allow the question of gender within the field to go unnoticed. As I mention in the introduction, my proximity to the people and institutions discussed here facilitated interviews and were key to an analysis that reveals a familiarity with the topics and narrative that only my lived experience and immersion in those spaces could provide.

briefly at UFBA, with a short stint as a substitute teacher at the UFBA Dance School.[23] He trained and mentored many of the dancers-choreographers who work with African-derived dance in Salvador today. The documentary brings to light his importance in the creation of an Afro-Bahian contemporary dance field and provides an audiovisual space for several male dancer-choreographers who worked with him and/or admired his work to talk about their experiences. For a legion of male and female dancers, the film gave them the opportunity to show their admiration and gratitude for his mentoring by attending the film's premiere.

By emphasizing Mestre King's and other male dancers' resistance to a discourse that dissociated men from professional dance and associated male dancers with homosexuality, and by adding a discussion around blackness in Salvador as a differential in the way male dancers created their own opportunities within the Bahian dance field, the director makes a fundamental contribution to the Afro-Brazilian dance archives. Nevertheless, women have not received the same attention as the men in the film and are consequently less present in this archive. Alongside the voice and dancing of Mestre King telling his own embodied stories, the voices and bodies of Zé Ricardo, Paco Gomes, Luiz Deveza, Ricardo Costa, Carlos Pereira Neguinho, Jorge Silva, Matias Santiago, Gabi Guedes, Clyde Morgan, Anderson Rodrigo, and other black dancers and musicians are present in the film ("Mestre King é homenageado"). References are also made to 1) Emília Biancardi, described as the person who used to teach him the steps of Afro-Brazilian popular dances such as *maculelê* in her own living room. Biancardi is also an

[23] Mestre King taught at the UFBA Dance School for two years as substitute instructor.

ethnomusicologist who founded Cojunto Folclórico Viva Bahia (Viva Bahia Folkloric Ensemble), the first folkloric dance company in Salvador in the second half of the 20th century, where Mestre King worked for a few years; 2) Clyde Morgan, a U.S. dancer-choreographer who was invited to teach at the UFBA Dance School in 1963 and later directed the UFBA Grupo de Dança Contemporânea – GDC (Contemporary Dance Group) between 1972 and 1976. Morgan worked with Limon Technique and, fascinated by the richness of Candomblé and Bahian culture, he invited dancers to participate collaborating with their embodied knowledge of Afro-Bahian movements in his choreographies. Mestre King points out his experience with Clyde Morgan as a formative influence on his knowledge about black dance. In Mestre King's words, presented in the documentary, "It was with Clyde Morgan that I first learned about black dance" (Mestre King in Jesus). Although there is no discussion in the film about this comment, it is important to understand that Mestre King had his first contact with U.S. black modern dance through Morgan, which helped him to develop and think about an Afro-Bahian modern dance style in later years. However, his "learning of a black dance" certainly expands that and encompasses the contributions of other mentors. Mestre King's knowledge of Afro-Bahian popular and folkloric dance learned with Emília Biancardi and his studies of capoeira while he was singing in the Mosteiro de São Bento – a Catholic church performance coral, may be considered part of his learning of black dance; 3) Domingos Campos, a Brazilian dancer-choreographer who founded and directed the group Olodumarê, along with the capoeira practitioner Edvaldo Carneiro (better known as "Camisa Roxa"), are also mentioned in the documentary. Mestre King

performed with this group in 1970 and 1971, having participated in a tour through Germany. In the film, he makes it clear that his interest was in working with his "black people" in Bahia, despite Campos insistently encouraging him to move to Europe or the U.S. by arguing that "the dancer's stage is the world" (Mestre King in Jesus). Mestre King traveled throughout the U.S. and Europe but he chose to stay in Bahia, and this important information about the knowledge he learned and chose to share with Bahian dance community is now registered as part of the Afro-Brazilian dance archives.

Mestre King's work became internationally known though his students who studied with him in Bahia and later went on to teach around the world. Among the internationally renowned artists who started their careers with Mestre King are Augusto Omolú (Portugal and Denmark), Rosangela Silvestre (United States), Armando Pequeno (France), Elísio Pitta (United States), Tânia Bispo (Argentina), among others. Interestingly, despite the importance of the women who have passed through Mestre King's life and disseminated his work across the globe, they are not even mentioned, cited, or referenced in the documentary. Silvestre has made always references to Mestre King's importance in her career. In her testimonies, Silvestre affirms that she initiated her studies of dance with Mestre King and she also reveals that he showed her how the dances of the Orixás could be explored as an art form in the dance studio. "He was the teacher who first encouraged me to become a professional and to enter the UFBA Dance School" (Silvestre). Tânia Bispo, who began working with Mestre King when she was seventeen-years-old, initially dancing in his dance company Balu that focused on

folkloric dance, and later teaching as a colleague at SESC, also mentions his importance as a mentor, dance teacher, and choreographer.

While de Jesus offers a fundamental contribution to the archives of dance in Bahia by giving visibility to and honoring one of the most important personalities of black dance in Brazil, he paradoxically leaves a gap by privileging male dancer-choreographers in his narrative. By dedicating more attention to the masculine figures of dance in Salvador, the documentary reproduces a trend within the field; one that places male dancer-choreographer-directors in a more visible position in relation to women, without presenting the real value of the work that women have also been doing. The film aims to illuminate Mestre King's pioneering work as a man succeeding in a space dominated by women by emphasizing the work that other men associated with him have been doing throughout history to make a point about black men's resistance and growth within the field. Thus, the limited attention to women's work seems to be justified, a point with which I disagree here.

Regarding this trend within the field, the privilege of male dancer-choreographers within black dance community was not only observed in Salvador's 2016 homage to Mestre King. In Rio de Janeiro that same year, the performance of the dance company Rubens Barbot Teatro de Dança (RBTD, or Rubens Barbot Dance Theater) at the opening night of the 4th edition of the national black performing arts festival Olonadé: A Cena Negra Brasileira (Olonadé: The Black Brazilian Scene) reinforced this trend. Founded in 1990 Rio de Janeiro, the contemporary black dance company Rubens Barbot Teatro de Dança has been acknowledged for its singular work around gestures, movements, and

images drawn from Afro-Brazilian and *carioca* (a term describing someone born in Rio de Janeiro) bodies (Companhia Rubens Barbot Teatro de Dança). Throughout its then twenty-six years of existence, the company's repertory includes more than twenty-one choreographies, a documentary film, and participation in national and international festivals such as the International Festival in Argentina (1993) and the 7th Biennale of Dance in Lyon, France. Although the cast of dancers has changed over twenty-six years, the idea of founders and directors Rubens Barbot and Gatto Larsen is to maintain a permanent group composed of black male and female dancers and actors/actresses working together toward a development of individual dancers and of the group. RBTD has been acknowledged for its pioneering contemporary work inspired by the lived experience of black people in Brazil, with special attention to those who inhabit the streets of Rio de Janeiro—the homeless, street vendors, artists, etc. (Barbot). The company is also well known for creating opportunities for black dancers and actors/actresses. On that opening night of the 4th Olonadé festival, what called my attention was the fact that the group that came to the stage in the piece "Signos" (Signs), a piece created one year before for the celebration of RBTD's twenty-fifth anniversary, included only six black men, at that time the company was composed only of six male dancers, including Rubens Barbot, who always performed with the group and the choreographer Luiz Monteiro.[24]

[24] For their presentation in 2015, year of the anniversary, they counted with the Bahian guest dancer-choreographer Elísio Pitta.

Despite the fact that this piece, choreographed by Luiz Monteiro and directed by Gatto Larsen, borrowed from iconic choreographies created and performed by the company throughout its twenty-five years of history—including moments when the company was composed of women and men, female dancers/actresses such as Claudia Ramalho, Valeria Monãn, Aline do Carmo, Sara Hana, Ana Gabriela Castro, and Ana Paula Dias, part of the "list of the dancers and actors/actresses who participated of the permanent cast of the company" (Rubens Barbot Teatro de Dança), were not there.[25] These women were fundamental participants in the company, providing artistic contributions and personal support to the development of the group's survival dynamics and aesthetics. Ramalho, for instance, worked with the group for more than ten years and was involved in the research and production of the 2007 documentary *Desorganizadores de Fichários* (Binder Disorganizers), about the RBTD, an exposition of the group's archive (photos, costumes, videos, etc.) in the same year, and a book on the history of the company in 2013. Monãn, an important dancer-actress-educator working with Afro-Brazilian dance and theater in Rio de Janeiro, left an imprint on the early years of the group with her knowledge of and experience with Afro-Brazilian dance and black communities in Rio. Because Barbot and Larsen had moved from the south of Brazil to Rio de Janeiro in the same year they founded the company, Monãn's knowledge of Rio's

[25] Although I did not work as a dancer with the company, in 2012 while conducting interviews that would assist in the writing of my M.A. thesis in Science of Arts at the Federal Fluminense University in Niteroi-Rio de Janeiro, I interviewed the directors Rubens Barbot and Gatto Larsen and the dancers Wilson and Claudia Ramalho. At that time, I gathered much information about the company. I also had access to video recordings of the companies' previous choreographies. In 2016, I was present at their performance at the opening night of the Olonadé festival.

black community was key for their penetration into the corporealities they wanted to investigate and incorporate into their work.

Although the 4th Olonadé was honoring two important black women artist-activists that year, Ruth de Souza[26] and Luiza Bairros[27] (in memoriam), RBTD's opening-night piece failed to represent them onstage. It is important to acknowledge that Hilton Cobra and the Cia dos Comuns, creators and organizers of the festival, have been critical in reflecting on gender at the conferences and festivals they produce. There were a large number of women participating at other points in the festival. The festival was also an important opportunity to recognize a dance company's journey led by a gay black male dancer-choreographer who had worked with men and women over twenty-six years – the RBTD. However, it is important to observe that these incongruences in terms of gender sometimes still go unnoticed.

As I mentioned before, Mestre King and RBTD have been fundamental in the history of black dance in Brazil. However, the narratives attached to the telling of their history induced me to reflect on feminist historiography's enquiries. As scholar Lyndsay Rose Russel asserts:

> Central to feminist historiography is the assumption that women were present and participating in the previous experiences of humanity regardless of whether they have figured into contemporary or subsequent narratives of it. And that assumption fuels not only recovery work—the kind that finds women who have been "forgotten," "underappreciated," "villainized"—but also self-reflexive work that exposes how "neutral" narratives are, in fact, gendered and tend to favor

[26] Ruth de Souza was the first black actress who worked with the Teatro Experimental do Negro (TEN, Experimental Black Theater) starting in (1944).

[27] Luiza Bairros (1953 - 2016) is an activist, professor, minister. She is one of the most respected voices when the topic is the battle against racial discrimination. Alongside her academic career, she coordinated projects and programs against the institutional racism. Bairros passed away in 2016. (Geledes 2017)

> certain (masculine) agents, domains, and modes of knowledge production. (Russel 171)

By noticing the neutrality of the documentary's and choreography's narratives in terms of the way they privilege men participations and productions in the history of Mestre King and RBTD, I raise the following questions: Why choose only masculine figures to showcase in such an important homage or celebration? If women were fundamental to the history of Mestre King in Salvador and to RBTD in Rio de Janeiro, why are they not integrated into these narratives? What histories of black Brazilian female dancer-choreographer-instructors have been told? How have black Brazilian female dancer-choreographer-instructors' participation in the history of dance been approached in historic narratives? Instead of trying to answer the first two questions that would be about how sexism operates in the field of black dance and historic narratives, which would maintain narratives which are dominated by works that place men in the spotlight, in this chapter, focusing on the latter questions and inspired by texts on feminist historiography and black feminisms I illuminate and examine the work and actions of black women dancer-choreographer-instructors. Specifically, I explore Rosangela Silvestre's and Edileusa Santos's interventions in the history of dance in Salvador and their expansion to the U.S. by focusing on their passages through and presence in the UFBA Dance School and the New Yorker and Bahian dance company Dance Brazil. By emphasizing their important contributions to the shaping of Afro-Bahian and Afro-diasporic contemporary dance, I argue that Santos's ongoing actions within academia have helped create an alternative route of activities that have included Afro-Brazilian and

Bahian popular dances and cultural elements throughout the years and have inspired students, professors, and staff members to remain active within that space. Moreover, by looking at Silvestre's activities, I argue that she has made a particular contribution to forging a black dance diaspora that extends from Salvador to the rest of the world from the 1990s to present day.

The foundation of the UFBA Dance School in 1956 was a milestone in the history of dance in Brazil. Despite the Eurocentric trend that was dominant within that space, the actions of activist-artists were fundamental to the discreet but continuing presence of African-based, Indigenous, and popular Bahian dances in that school and to the well-being of students who held connections with that content and were interested in exploring them in academia. Santos and Silvestre, who during their undergraduate studies became dancers at Odundê, a UFBA Dance School research group that focused on the study of dance and rhythms with African roots, were part of a movement that affirmed black identities in that school. After the deactivation of the group, despite both dancer-choreographer-instructors securing the position as part of the university dance school's permanent staff, Silvestre moved in a different direction nationally and transnationally while Santos reached a transnational space of the African diaspora while working with Dance Brazil and Jelon Vieira but continues to maintain her ties with the dance school, occupying that space as an "artist in academia" (Santos). By leading projects that enable the inclusion of African-rooted dances and content in an alternative route and even integrating them into the academic curriculum at the school, Santos's actions have been

fundamental in facilitating the connections between students, staff members, and professors and their Afro-Bahian culture and Afro-diasporic heritage within academia.

Concomitant to her studies, performances, and choreographic practices within the UFBA Dance School, and particularly with Odundê, Silvestre collaborated in the founding of the FUNCEB in 1984 currently known as a place of professionalization of Bahian dancers and choreographers at a technical level in Salvador.[28] Silvestre also began to work with the dance companies Dance Brazil and Balé Folclórico da Bahia respectively in 1992 and 1994. Through her work with Dance Brazil, Silvestre began to nourish her interest in the U.S. and strengthen her ties to that country and the African diaspora. She employed her efforts to develop her technique and an international career. In order to stay outside Brazil for longer periods of time and invest in her travels Silvestre requested that she be officially discharged from her permanent position at the UFBA Dance School. Although Santos had also worked with the Dance Brazil as dancer and choreographer for more than ten years, her choice to maintain her connection with Brazil and Brazilian academia helped expand her work more nationally than transnationally. In contrast, Silvestre's "butterfly"—a term she uses to describes herself: "I am a little butterfly" (Silvestre)—spirit contributed to her international recognition as a dancer-choreographer and to her ongoing shaping of the black concert dance diaspora extending from Salvador, Bahia, to the rest of the world.

[28] FUNCEB, founded in 1984 under the direction of Lia Robatto and Angela Dantas, is considered one of the main spaces of training and professionalization of dancers in Salvador, having been compared to UFBA Dance School in terms of excellence of teaching.

FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF BAHIA DANCE SCHOOL: 60 YEARS OF PIONEERING AND ETHNOCENTRISM

> *Sixty years of existence. And, after sixty years since its foundation, one side of the door is opened so that, through the main entrance, new possibilities can be presented which will lead to reflection on the gap caused by ethnocentrism. 'Time, time, time, time!' This is an accomplishment of the struggles initiated by Mestre King, by the group Odundê, Clyde Morgan, Yanka [Rudzka], Nadir Nóbrega, Edileusa Santos, Tânia Bispo, Leda Ornelas, Sandra Santana, Bebé [Neusa Saad], and other professionals, master teachers who—while trying to transform the UFBA Dance School into a democratic space of knowledge—inserted, even by way of contraband, the elements of dances of African, Indigenous, and popular origins into their practice and inserted effective actions in the institution, and who created works affirming the black body with [their] black-political-tester-transforming-body. What I celebrate is the existence of these references who will always encourage me to stay on the path to achieve equity in the proliferation and valorization of the knowledge, while also allowing dance to be understood through diversity and difference, because our cultures propel knowledge, and they are knowledge.*[29]
>
> ¶ - Vânia Oliveira, Interview in Neves -

[29] "60 anos de existência. E. após 60 anos de fundação, um lado da porta se abre para que pela entrada principal possam ser apresentadas possibilidades que levarão a reflexão sobre a lacuna causada pelo etnocentrismo. 'Tempo, tempo, tempo, Tempo…!' Esta é uma conquista de lutas iniciadas por Mestre King, pelo Grupo Odundê, por Clyde Morgan, Yanka, Nadir Nóbrega, Edileusa Santos, Tânia Bispo, Leda Ornelas, Sandra Santana, Bebé, outros e outras profissionais, mestres e mestras que tentando fazer da Escola de Dança da UFBA um espaço democrático do saber, inseriram, mesmo que tenha sido pela via do contraband, os elementos das Danças de Matriz Africanas, Indígenas e Populares em suas práticas e efetivas atuações na instituição e realizaram trabalhos de afirmação do corpo negro com um corpo-negro-político-provador-transformador. O que comemoro é a existência destas referências que sempre irão me motivar a permanecer no caminho para alcançarmos equidade da proliferacão e valorização dos sabers e conhecimentos possibilitando também compreender a dança a partir da diversidade e diferença, pois nossas culturas são propulsoras de conhecimentos, e, são conhecimentos." (Vânia Oliveira in Neves 246; translation mine)

In 2016 the UFBA Dance School, which was celebrating sixty years of existence, held a "Teachers' Selective Exam" for two Associate Professor positions with exclusive preference given, for the first time, to scholars or individuals with expertise in African, Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous, and popular Brazilian dances. This momentous event, especially for the black dance community, emerged from a confluence of students voicing their demands and activist-artists' internal actions and projects throughout the school's sixty years of existence. Early twenty-first-century Brazil has been marked by the creation of important measures and laws to guarantee the rights of black and lower-class youth in public education (Santos E. F. et al 949). As examples of legislation that has been essential to confronting ethnic and racial inequalities in Brazil, Elisabete Figueroa do Santos, Eliane Aparecida Toledo Pinto, and Andréia Melanda Chirinéa cite Law 10.639/2003, "which places the need to work contents of Afro-Brazilian history and Culture into education"; Law 12.288/2010, which establishes the Racial Equality Statute; and Law 12.711/2012, which established a system of quotas for black students in higher education (950). With the creation of these laws and the rise of affirmative action, underrepresented groups have gained more space to talk about their needs and desires. At the UFBA Dance School, it was no different. Students' voices became more powerful, not only in terms of being more pronounced, but also in terms of getting more attention. Nevertheless, these students' initiatives were only possible due to the previous and continued efforts employed by important dancer-choreographer-educators who created alternatives, "even by way of contraband" (Oliveira V. in Neves 246) to include studies related to African-derived, popular Bahian, and Indigenous dances and cultures along

with the struggle to ensure the "well-being" of black students within that then majoritarian white space.[30]

The history of UFBA Dance School is marked by a "gap caused by ethnocentrism," as Vânia Oliveira asserts in the opening quotation. A gap that distanced the school from the culture in which it is immersed, the students from their (corpo)realities, concert dance from an African-based knowledge in academia, and the presence of black subjects, especially black women, from positions of academic governance. A gap that comes from a colonialist ideology and from social hierarchies reproduced and reflected in higher education. As a consequence, a curriculum that failed to include—or included only with a folkloric perspective—studies of African-derived, Indigenous, and Brazilian popular dances persisted from its official creation in 1962 until the most significant curriculum reform in 2004. The reform that transformed a framework with rigid disciplines into transdisciplinary modules opened up space for this content, or became more flexible in this sense, but it does not necessarily require these kinds of approaches even in the present moment.[31] As Mestre King observed in an interview in 2015:

> Time has passed and a lot of things have changed, but the [UFBA Dance] School remains a bourgeois school with a European methodology and is always seeking foreign professors. […] It is extremely rare to find black professors born in the Bahian capital who have access to the faculty tenure position at the UFBA Dance

[30] Although throughout the years the UFBA Dance School received a large number of black students – especially from the 1980s until present day – which created a balance in terms of racial identity of students, this school was created upon values and students that came from a Bahian elite – mostly white.

[31] This assertion is based on the testimony of Conceição Castro, former professor of UFBA Dance School in an interview conducted by Denilson Neves. (Neves)

School.[32] (Mestre King in Motta 39-40)

Before the [2004] curriculum reform, two smaller reforms in 1971 and 1994 expanded elective disciplines but kept intact the core program of disciplines that did not intersect with Bahian cultural productions and influences (Neves 63). Moreover, students, especially during the 1980s and 1990s, experienced a trauma in the process of studying that denied their corporealities. As Margarida Motta asserts, "the bodies of black dancers were adapted to a style and taste that were strange and imposed a renunciation of their cultural and genetic memory. The bodies of black Bahian dancers suffered with a process of domestication and docilization[33] to a homogenized taste of a colonizing white aesthetic"[34] (15). Motta, who was also a student at the UFBA Dance School in the 1980s, critically analyzes her lived experience as an almost "silencing" experience. Other dancer-choreographer-educators have expressed similar impressions of that period. Furthermore, social hierarchies which rule academic hierarchies have kept black (Bahian) subjects at a distance from positions of governance and competencies, in spite of the level of knowledge the subjects hold. The entanglement of resistance to the acknowledgement of African-derived culture as epistemology and the exclusion based on the interface of race and gender are potential causes of the quite late opening of the "Teachers' Selective Exam" in 2016, sixty years after the school was founded. Through this exam, two black

[32] "O tempo passou e muita coisa mudou, mas a Escola continua sendo uma escola burguesa, com uma metodologia européia sempre em busca dos professores estrangeiros [….] São raríssimos os professores negros que nasceram na capital baiana que têm acesso à posição de docente da Escola de Dança da UFBA". (Mestre king in Motta 39-40; my translation)

[33] The author is referring here to the process of tuning a dancing body into a "docile body." As Michael Foucault describes, a docile body as a disciplined and well trained-to-obey body. (Foucault 133)

[34] "Os corpos dos negros baianos sofreram um processo de domesticação e docilização para um gosto homogeneizado de uma estética branca e colonizadora." (Motta 15)

women dancer-scholars from Salvador, Bahia, were approved in first and second place. Yet, for personal reasons, only one of these women actually assumed her position. As Mestre King explains in his testimony, the school has a history of valuing foreign knowledge and individuals, which has left its imprint on the dance community's imagination to the present day. I argue that what Mestre King said is indeed the case, based on the examples of Yanka Rudzka (1956–1959), Holf Gelewisky (1962–1970), and Clyde Morgan (1971–1980) at the UFBA Dance School as directors of the school and director of the GDC, respectively.

Founded in 1956, the UFBA Dance School plays a significant role in the history of dance in Brazil (Setenta, Araújo, Motta, Neves). As the first official dance school in a Brazilian institution of higher education, the school was considered innovative because it inaugurated a period of acknowledgement of this art as a science and continued a trend toward modernization. As Motta observes, the UFBA Dance School was moved by a desire to "free itself from conservatism by adopting a cosmopolitan and universalist posture" (31-32) which involved the importation of foreign ideas and individuals. By placing value on German expressionist modern dance, which was consolidated under the direction of Yanka Rudzka, a Polish woman who worked with Mary Wigman in Germany and lived for three years in São Paulo, the dance school achieved the goals of its visionaries. In addition to importing ideas and artists (a few years after Rudzka, Holf Gelewisky, a German dancer who worked with Wigman and Marianne Volgesang in Germany, became the school's director), the school was innovative in the way it operated

in contrast to the earlier value assigned to classical ballet in Brazil[35] (Setenta 71). As Dulce Aquino, director of the dance school, affirms:

> [The UFBA Dance School] was not an ordinary program. It was a dance program, not a traditional dance program of Eurocentric classical ballet, but a program of experimental dance for a modern vanguard, during a period in which the country was rediscovered; the modernity of the early 20th century […] for twenty-eight years we were the only higher education [dance] program in the country; only in [19]84 did two other programs emerge.[36] ("Caruru e estréia de espetáculo")

Indeed, the UFBA Dance School has been acknowledged as an avant-garde school, an "elitist vanguard" (Araújo 60, Setenta 71, Motta 31). Nevertheless, if on the one hand the school possessed an innovative character that was mainly rooted in modernism and the modern dance style implemented at the school, as Aquino observes, on the other hand the modern dance style adopted by the school was as "Eurocentric" as the classical ballet taught in dance studios and theaters throughout Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Salvador, and other cities in Brazil.[37] In addition, although in the first years of work the school resisted to the entrance of students with classical background,[38] until the UFBA Dance School's curriculum reform of 2004, classical ballet was a core course taught at three levels and for three semesters (Classical Ballet I, II, and III), becoming

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[35] Maria Olenewa was a Russian ballerina who founded the first school for classical ballet in Brazil in 1927.

[36] The speech in Portuguese can be found at "Caruru e estréia de espetáculo" https://www.agendartecultura.com.br/patrimonio/caruru-estreia-espetaculo-marcam-comemoracoes-60-anos-escola-danca/.

[37] Before that foundation the main dance school was the Ebateca School of Ballet from the Castro Alves Theater (Ebateca Escola de Ballet) and the Contemporary Dance School (Escola Contemporânea de Dança), which were both private dance schools with a focus on the teaching of classical ballet.

[38] This information is based on the testimony of the professor and choreographer Lia Robatto. In the documentary Quem Te Viu, Quem Quer te Ver Lia Robatto asserts that at UFBA Dance School there was a "resistance to dancers who carried the mannerisms of classical ballet" (Robatto in Silva J.). According to Robatto, the "ideal" students to enter the school should not reveal through their bodies any signs of techniques; they should be "pure" bodies to learn and embody an expressionist modern dance. (Silva J.)

throughout the years a lens that determined the degree of acceptance or success of students by most of the professors, especially after the direction of Yanka Rudzka. Rudzka directed the school from 1956 to 1959 and established an experimental context of modern expressive dance and a non-systematic process of conducting studies there, which was criticized by academics (Araújo 66-67). When she left the school's directorship, there was a transition period in which classical technique was "abruptly implemented" (Araújo 67) and classical ballet and U.S. (white) modern dance came to be understood and subtly envisioned as the only techniques that could train a "good" dancer; these disciplines were explicitly privileged in the UFBA Dance School's curriculum.

Several students who attended the dance school in the 1980s reveal their discomfort with the level of importance attributed to European and white U.S.-based courses and with the lack of classes that allowed them to express themselves and succeed in terms of grades and performance within the school. This is especially true for students with an Afro-Brazilian and/or Afro-Bahian dance background, most of whom were students of Mestre King and who had started to envision higher education and were encouraged by him to work toward their professionalization (Castro in Silva J.). Most of these students struggled with the process of what Motta described as "domestication and docilization" (15) of the body. The following testimonies demonstrate the students' discomfort and dissatisfaction.

> The biggest shock I experienced when I entered the UFBA Dance School, coming from an African-derived background, was to understand that the dance school didn't accept the corporeality I brought. In other words, the dance school did not accept my corporeal identity and wanted to impose a different identity as the right

> one. I had to study [classical] ballet and modern dance. My body had to respond. I had to achieve grades; good grades."[39] (Carvalho)
>
> That was a very different language because they required that I have a toned body adequate for that technique […] they required that I fit that model, and it was a model that did not speak about me and a model I did not know how to speak to […] Because the main problem at that time was the pattern. It had to be in that way. My large butt, where would I put it? Because it was part of the design of my body, an ancestral tattoo. So I saw that as an aggression.[40] (Bispo)

The words of both Carvalho and Bispo are critical in revealing that—in addition to the methodological and aesthetic choices of a school that was Euro- and U.S.-centered—it was not only about learning the techniques but also about neutralizing or re-configuring their bodies. In a similar way, Rosangela Silvestre, who entered the school at the same time as Bispo, describes her process within the dance school as a moment of "discarding" a memory embodied through the experiences she had not only in her dance classes with Mestre King but also before that with her great-grandparents, *Caboclos* who would sing and move while performing their daily activities, and with her mother, who facilitated her access to Candomblé houses and ceremonies. In Silvestre's words, "My way with dance was first by observing, absorbing, and discarding, right after that, a memory" (Silvestre). By considering that the process of "observing and absorbing" refers to her experiences with family and informal education and the "discarding" to the time

[39] "O maior choque foi entender que a Escola de Dança da UFBA não aceitava a corporalidade que eu trazia. Ou seja, a escola de dança não aceitava a minha identidade como sendo a identidade correta. O bale, a dança moderna, eu tinha que fazer. Meu corpo tinha que responder. Eu tinha que tirar notas, boas notas" (Carvalho; mine translation).

[40] "Era uma linguagem muito diferente porque me exigiam que eu tivesse um corpo lapidado para se adequar `aquela técnica […] eles exigiam que eu me encaixasse naquele modelo, que era um modelo que não falava de mim, e um modelo que eu não sabia falar. Porque o maior problema da época era o padrão.Tinha que ser assim. A minha bunda grande, onde eu ia colocar? Porque ela faz parte do design do meu corpo, é uma tatuagem ancestral, então eu via aquilo como uma agrassão." (Bispo; my translation)

she attended formal dance schools, Silvestre suggests that the denial of a specific embodied memory as soon as she entered the UFBA Dance School constituted an erasure in formal dance education.

The three voices I emphasize above are the voices of black women who, not long after experiencing and understanding the methods and philosophy adopted by UFBA Dance School, supported the creation of a "space of freedom" within that school to express their corporealities, the dance group Odundê. The emergence of Odundê in 1981 was a reverberation throughout academia of a strong movement valuing African-roots and blackness in Salvador.[41]

> What saved me was the existence of the group Odundê. These women noticed me at school. Tânia Bispo, Edileusa Santos, Rosangela Silvestre. They noticed me and then invited me to come to Odundê […] It was at Odundê where I found the reverberations of my voice; the reverberations of my corporeal voice.[42] (Carvalho)

> Odundê emerged at the moment when I screamed. Isaura [Oliveira] screamed, Rosangela [Silvestre] screamed, Bebé [Neusa Saad] was screaming, Conga [Reginaldo Flores] had already been screaming for a long time and nobody was listening, and because my scream was louder…we brought together those people who, during that period, were feeling the pain of having to express something that did not belong to their internal relationship.[43] (Bispo)

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[41] The 1970s in Salvador were marked by the emergence of a black social movement, and cultural and artistic creations by such groups as the *bloco afro* Ilê Aiyê were fundamental in consolidating this movement in subsequent years.

[42] O que me salvou foi a existência do grupo Odundê. Essas mulheres me perceberam na Escola, Tânia Bispo, Edileusa [Santos], Rosangela [Silvestre]. Elas me perceberam e me convidaram pra vir pro Odundê […] era no Odundê que eu encontrava a reverberação da minha voz; a reverberação da minha voz corporal" (Carvalho; mine translation).

[43] Aí surgiu o Odundê no momento em que eu gritei. Isaura [Oliveira] gritou, Rosangela [Silvestre] gritou, Bebé [Neusa Saad] estava gritando, Conga já estava gritando há muito tempo, e ninguém escutava. Como meu grito foi o maior, e aí nos agregamos – as pessoas que nessa época estavam sentindo muito, muito essa dor de ter que expresser algo que não pertencia a sua relação interna" (Bispo; my translation).

> We [the five women dancing with Odundê in 1984] found such a strong cohesion in the process of researching, creating, and performing that people started to call us the "Odundê girls."[44] (Santos)

Bispo describes her scream as the "scream of Odundê," a scream that evoked change, the "new year, new life" claimed by the meaning of the word in Yoruba. In her view, it was her scream during the period when she was taking the Improvisation III course with Conceição Castro, a scream that resonated with other black students' screams, which led to the group's creation. In the same way, Motta describes Odundê as "a dance group founded by black students at the Federal University of Bahia Dance School in the 80s" (viii). As Motta emphasizes, her historical and analytical research and analysis relies on different testimonies, which demonstrates dissonances between different perspectives. In this case, racial difference plays an important role in the way Odundê's emergence, maintenance, and end, as well as other expectations around it, are perceived.

Conceição Castro, who as a professor at the dance school developed a proposal for Afro-Brazilian Dance Movement Studies, says that she was inspired by Yanka Rudzka and Rolf Gelewisky, who "always looked at our dances," (Castro in Neves 236-237) to develop the proposal. Castro, who also went on to become the director and leader of Odundê for ten years, also calls attention to her perception of a change in the student profile, which included a large number of black working-class students with an African-

[44] "Nós, [as cinco mulheres que dançavam no Odundê em 1984], encontramos uma coesão tão forte no processo de pesquisa, criação e performance que as pessoas comecaram a nos chamar de 'As meninas do Odundê'" (Santos; my translation).

derived dance background. In noticing the tensions and discrepancies generated between the school's ideology and aesthetics and the bodies of the incoming black students, she began to open up space in her classes and reflect on possible projects that could include the expression of their movement identities (Motta 55-56). In her Improvisation III course, Castro encouraged the construction of a movement vocabulary based on the students' culture and lived experiences. Without minimizing Castro's fundamental contribution to the creation and legitimization of that group as a space for black expression within academia and contesting European-based content as hegemonic, I call attention to her emphasis on Rudzka and Gelewisky, two foreign (white) directors, as inspirations for her reflections on the need to create that research group and proposal (Castro in Neves; Castro in Silva J.). The difference in Castro's and Bispo's emphasis while narrating the story about Odundê's emergence did not go unnoticed.

Alongside Odundê's decolonizing role within the dance school, the creative process embraced by Castro and the dancers marked the dancers' perception of their fundamental participation not only as interpreters, but also as researchers and creators. As Santos emphasizes, the active participation of Odundê's dancers in the creative process as a collective experience succeeded mainly due to their involvement and harmony in terms of sharing what they had to offer. Odundê's dancers also found harmony onstage, which gave them a visibility inside and outside of academia. Santos, Silvestre, Bispo, Sueli Ramos, and Lêda Ornelas were known as the "Odundê Girls." "They were Odundê and Odundê was them" (Santos). Their identities overlapped. It is interesting to observe that in the group's performance program, the choreography *Marongé* (1984) has the signature

of the group as choreographers, and in *Obirin Marun–Dé* (1988), the group is mentioned as "director," in addition to being listed as dancers (Motta 63-68). The omission of dancers as creators in previous works (*Odundê* 1982, *Didewa* 1983) seemed to be one of the reasons behind dancers questioning and leaving the group prior to that year.[45]

In 1991, Castro left as director of the group and Santos, Bispo, Ramos, Ornelas, Silvestre, and Oliveira initiated a new and much more challenging period of resistance within academia. Through their work with Odundê, the six women mentioned above accepted permanent positions as part of the university's staff, which ensured their ongoing contributions to the presence of studies centered around Afro-Bahian culture and dances in that space. However, the challenges that already existed under Castro's direction grew after she left. These included the lack of available studios for their rehearsals, a reduced budget to produce new pieces, and the difficulty dancers had in accessing costumes from old choreographies, among others. The group was inactive for a year, was active again for two years, and in 1995 closed down for good.[46]

For about fifteen years, Odundê was the only space where black students with a background in Afro-Brazilian dance styles and whose bodies were informed by elements of black culture in Bahia could explore and investigate movement in a way that would encourage them to develop their own movement vocabularies that allowed them to express themselves outside the box that was imposed on them in the dance school. From

[45] This assertion is based on interviews I conduct with dancers and few testimonies in the documentary film *Quem te viu, Quem quer te ver* (Silva J.).

[46] Although the group formally became inactive, the initiative still exists—Santos refers to the research group as a current element of her curriculum vitae—and there were sporadic efforts made towards its reactivation. I myself participated in the efforts to keep that group active within the UFBA Dance School when I was invited to perform Sueli Ramos's piece *Sacrificação* (Sacrification) in 1997.

that experience, most of the dancer-choreographer-educators who had the chance to work with the group developed their own methodologies and choreographing strategies. Some of them used these tools outside the dance school, outside the city of Salvador, and in some cases outside Brazil, such as Rosangela Silvestre and Isaura Oliveira. In commenting on the unfolding of Odundê, Castro acknowledges that this initiative provided tools for the dancer's growth and contributions to the dance field. But she also declares:

> One thing I believe is very important to highlight is the fact that I said to the girls, maybe I did not say it to Tânia [Bispo], but I said to Edileusa [Santos], Lêda [Ornelas], and Sueli [Ramos]: "I expected you to apply for a faculty position here at this dance school." I left them as part of the permanent staff [when I left], they are public [federal] employees here at the university because of [their work with] Odundê. And why didn't they study? Why didn't they do a master's degree? Why didn't they apply for a faculty position at the dance school? This may be my biggest…not my biggest sorrow, but sadness, because I worked with Odundê for ten years. When I saw that they had the means to keep going by themselves, I said, "I will leave. Now it is yours." What I mean is that I raised the group to a high level of quality within the dance school, [the group was] respected, received awards, traveled to France and across Brazil with the Mambembe Prize, etc. All of that, "now it is yours," and where are they? (Castro in Silva J.)[47]

Black feminist texts provide essential tools for my analysis of Castro's tricky comment. As a white woman, Castro seems to anchor her frustration for her former dancers' lack of mobility within the academic hierarchy and consequent autonomy to propose courses and research groups based on African-derived knowledge and studies, as

[47] Uma coisa que eu acho importantíssimo é que eu disse as meninas do Odundê, talvez eu não tenha dito a Tânia mas eu disse a Edileusa, Leda e Sueli, eu eperava que vcs tivessem feito concurso aqui para a escola. Eu deixei elas como técnicas, elas são funcionárias aqui na universidade por causa do Odundê e porque que não estudaram? Porque que não fizeram mestrado? Porque que não fizeram concurso pra escola de dança? Talvez seja a minha grande, não é mágoa mas tristeza, porque eu fiz com o grupo Odundê 10 anos, quando eu vi que elas jea tinham condiçõoes de irem sozinhas eu disse, eu saio, agora ee de vcs. Quer dizer, eu botei o grupo numa qualidade muito boa dentro da escola, respeitado, ganhou premio, foi pra França, viajou o Brazil com Prêmio Mambembe, nao sei o que, tudo isso, entao agora é de vcs e cadê elas?

Castro herself could do, to a belief in meritocracy. As Angela P. Harris and Carmen G. González assert:

> Despite this evidence of persistent inequality, the belief in meritocracy and the narrative of upward mobility through hard work and self-sacrifice continue to serve as defining national myths (Delgado 2007; Hochschild 1996). Higher education, in particular, is widely regarded as the ticket to social advancement. Higher education exerts a powerful pull on the American imagination. (Harris and González 1)

Although the authors are specifically referring to U.S. society, their perception of a belief in meritocracy contributes to distorted visions of the realities faced by underrepresented groups. According to the authors, "women of color who have managed to enter the rarefied halls of academe as full-time faculty find themselves in a peculiar situation" (2). I would add that women of color within academia in any position experience a peculiar situation. Even as part of the full-time permanent staff at UFBA Dance School, the women that Castro cites face internal and external factors that have certainly contributed to their permanence in that school as staff members, instead of propelling them to a hierarchic mobility and faculty position. Factors that most of the time go unnoticed by those who are unaffected by them. Santos, Bispo, Ornelas, Ramos, and Sandra Santana (a black woman dancer-choreographer-educator who joined the UFBA permanent staff soon after the other women mentioned here) have spent more than thirty years in administrative functions, teaching dance in extra-curricular courses for students who are preparing to enter the UFBA Dance School, and periodically performing other functions. They are made invisible and undervalued on a daily basis by the "culture of academia [that is] distinctly white, heterosexual, and middle- and upper-

middle-class" (3). I group these women under the concept of "[black] artists within academia," words used by Santos to describe her own experience (Santos). These women keep struggling to develop their work and projects, but once they deviate from the norm, they are affected by the consequences of being "presumed incompetent" (Harris and Gonzalez 3).

Another aspect I noticed when comparing the testimonies of Santos, Silvestre, and Bispo about Odundê to Castro's words above, is the use of the "we" versus the "I." The sense of collective or "shared work" is part of the narrative of the three black women, whereas in Castro's narrative the "I" prevails, especially when she is calling attention to the accomplishments of the group. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and Politics of Empowerment*, Patricia Hill Collins reveals that "while individual empowerment is key, only collective action can effectively generate the lasting institutional transformation required for social justice" (309). In their daily practices, black women acknowledge the importance of each other's efforts toward their accomplishments and they value the collective. Santos, Bispo, Silvestre, and also Ramos and Santana acknowledge that.

It is this belief in shared work that informs these women's recognition and reverence to the ones who came first and, in certain way, opened up the front door for them within academia. As Vânia Oliveira said, "even by way of contraband" or through the back doors, they were fundamental in inserting and maintaining elements of an Afro-Brazilian heritage within that space. Brazilian scholars such as Denilson Francisco das Neves, Lauana Vilaronga Cunha de Araújo, and Alexandre José Molina identify discrete

movements toward the incorporation of African-rooted dances in the dance school since its creation. They provide indicators of director-choreographers' interest in combining studies of German expressionist modern dance and studies from local culture. Yanka Hudzka (1956–1959), Holf Gelewisky (1962–1970), and Clyde Morgan (1971–1980), with their external perspectives and the members of the group Odundê (1981–1991), Edva Barreto, Reginaldo Flores (Conga), Neusa Saad, Suzanna Martins, Nadir Nóbrega, and others with a Bahian/local gaze contributed to the implementation of studies and experiences that embraced elements of Afro-Bahian culture and also created a sort of *currículo oculto*, or "hidden curriculum"[48] (Neves 59), which I call an alternative route to nourishing and keeping alive black contributions to the shaping of dance in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil.

Among the Odundê girls, over the last thirty-four years, Santos has led projects such as the NEAB (Center for Afro-Brazilian Studies), through which she promoted national and transnational seminars, dance workshops, performances, and black dance community public encounters over a five-year period; she has taught undergraduate classes in her Dance of Black Expression methodology for more than ten years; she has given a series of speeches called *Movimento em Bate Papo: Memória da Dança na Bahia* (Movement in Conversation: Memory of Dance in Bahia) (2012–2013); and she was responsible for the creation and performance of the work *Mulheres do Asé* (*Asé* Women), a piece that promoted the reunion of the "Odundê Girls" as an active collective. Sueli

[48] *Curriculo oculto* is described by Neves as the curriculum composed by contents that are disguised under disciplines with names that do not highlight it. According to Neves the *curriculo oculto* is part of an invisible and unspeakable graduation or formation.

Ramos has collaborated with Santos in some of the aforementioned projects and has worked on developing her own career outside of academia as a backing vocalist and as a dancer with companies such as Dance Brazil. Bispo has been teaching in Brazil and Argentina using a methodology that combines Jungian psychology with dances of the Orixás to help people to find ways to express themselves. Bispo also worked as a dance instructor and choreographer for twenty years at SESC. Ornelas is currently in Argentina completing her M.A. in Dance Education, and Santana is completing her Ph.D. in Theater at UFBA, in addition to teaching her own methodology to undergraduates.

Consequently, when I hear Castro asking, "Where are they?" my response is: They are right there! They are "surviving and thriving" (Niemann 446). In consonance with Yolanda Flores Niemann's perception that "even within the walls of these often-pernicious academic environments, women of color can assert their voices, effect change, find allies, and not only survive, but thrive" (446), I argue that black women in Brazilian academia are resisting and succeeding by using what they can to achieve, and the challenges are not great enough to prevent them from doing it.

As just one example, in 2016, Sandra Santana faced a challenge that required her to find strategies in order to continuing struggling. She applied for and participated as a candidate in the "Teacher's Selective Exam" with a focus on African, Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous, and Brazilian popular dances. She was eliminated immediately after a required performance on the second day of the exam without further explanation. Assistant professors of the UFBA Dance and Theater schools who were following the open evaluations—though not as members of the committee—could not find any

plausible reason for Santana's elimination at that point in the exam, especially considering the skill level of the other candidates. Because the evaluation criteria were subjective and relied on the selection committee, there was no way to contest or actually explain the reasons for her denial of mobility within that school. The limited spaces these women are allowed to penetrate have been paradoxically and concomitantly spaces of freedom to work and spaces of reasserting internal hierarchies. These spaces involve the "ongoing interplay between Black women's oppression and Black women's activism" (309) in which the matrix of domination responds to the agency of these women. This interplay can also be read as the "playing with instability" that I have suggested, which involves the creation of ongoing movement and actions to find an alternative equilibrium and spaces for action by dealing with the "pushes" outside a position of stability.

Although Santana was invited to teach undergraduates between 2001 and 2014, she experienced a "push" out of a space of freedom, and an action to reassert the hierarchy within the Dance School, when her many years of teaching undergraduates had no impact on her participation in the selective exam. As she declared:

> I became invisible here. In this sense, despite the thirteen years of effective collaboration in the undergraduate program, it seems like nothing happened. It's crazy because it reveals a bit of the prejudice, because I don't believe it is about me as a person, but rather the proposal that is not interesting to the institution. (Santana)

If on the one hand Santana identifies her invisibility within that space as part of the prejudice toward content that is anchored in Afro-Brazilian culture, on the other hand she is unable to acknowledge, or express, how these things are embedded within an academic racism. The complexity of her "peculiar situation" (Harris and Gonzalez 2) complicates

not only the way these acts of oppression are disguised and subtly employed but also the way it affects subjects engaged with tentative explanations in order to keep resisting and fighting in that hostile environment. Playing with instability in academia involves a daily effort to not give up. In relation to this experience, Santana refers to the piece *Mulheres do Asé* as fundamental to her process of recovery and re-encouragement to continue working at the dance school.

The collaboration of Santana and Santos in the creation of the Curriculum Reconstruction Project (2004), a reform required by the Brazilian Ministry of Education, is another example of the creation of instability for these women. In 2001, when the school's director of faculty and coordinators began working on the reform, they invited Santos to participate as a member of the Center for Afro-Brazilian Studies who would teach the "Body Studies Module" with a focus on "identities and diversities" (Neves 105). This reform was remarkable for its "transformation of a disciplinary curriculum into a transdisciplinary modular proposal" (Neves xi) and was officially approved in 2004. Between 2001 and 2014, Santos and Santana taught their methodologies based on the relationship with drums and capoeira, respectively. After thirteen years Santos, whose methodology is based on the body-drum and drum-body relationship, was informed by the directors that there were no musicians/drummers available to play in her class, and she was compelled to stop teaching undergraduates. As Santos observes:

> First, it was very difficult for me to have drums in my classroom. This understanding, I think, is not just about putting [the class] there and saying, "there's this Law 10.639." No…. you need to have an understanding, a reflection about what this culture that's entering the school needs. It needs the instruments,

> the tools that are necessary to provide support so that this thing can actually happen.[49] (Santos in Neves 107)

Niemann provides an interesting concept in relation to what Santos is saying in the comment above. By asserting that "women of color experience the psychological and career consequences of tokenism" (449), I use Niemann's words to reinforce Santos's claim for an understanding of this culture. The author uses two different references to define the concept. First, the *American Heritage Dictionary* (2000), where tokenism is defined as "the policy of making only a perfunctory effort or symbolic gesture toward the accomplishment of a goal, such as racial integration; […] the practice of hiring or appointing a token number of people from underrepresented groups in order to deflect criticism or comply with alternative action rules" (Niemann 449). Second, the *Collins English Dictionary* (2003), in which tokenism is defined as "the practice of making only a token effort or doing no more than the minimum, especially in order to comply with a law" (Niemann 449). Both sources provide explanations that facilitate an understanding of how the inclusion of Santos's classes on African-based content in the UFBA Dance School curriculum merely to "comply with a law" was not enough for an actual inclusion.

[49] "Primeiro, tinha muita dificuldade de ter o tambor em sala. Esse entendimento, eu acho que não é só colocar e dizer, 'tem a Lei 10.639…' Não…é preciso um entendimento, uma reflexão sobre o que essa cultura adentrando na escola precisa? Precisa dos instrumentos, das ferramentas que são necessárias para dar suporte para que a coisa possa realmente acontecer." (Santos in Neves 107)

SANTOS'S ACTIVE PARTICIPATION WITHIN ACADEMIA: CREATING ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO INCLUDE AFRICAN-ROOTED AND POPULAR DANCES IN THE ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

> *We were in the same place and, when we casually met, we hug each other and talked as friends, but she [Santos] was doing her things and I was doing mine.*[50]
>
> - Tania Bispo, Interview -

> *Once again, Edileusa [Santos] positioned herself as a person who actually has a political militancy. I thought [Mulheres do Asé] was the surprise of the year and the best thing that happened to me because we got together again. We are employees and artists, dancers who were each one in a corner, because the school really is not interested in us in this sense. There is interest in another sense, but in this sense [as artists], never. Here there was no welcome [for us as a group of artists]: "We are not going to put them to work on artistic processes with some group, together." So, this [project] is very important as a political group connection.*[51]
>
> ¶ - Sandra Santana, Interview -

Bispo's words describing the period they experienced before Santos's project *Mulheres do Asé* reinforce Santana's emphasis on the reunion of a black women's collective within the UFBA Dance School. While talking about the 2016's project designed, produced, and led by Santos, Santana identifies the four black women who are currently part of the permanent staff at UFBA Dance School as a group of artists.[52] The re-connection of Santos, Santana, Ramos, and Bispo as an artistic collective reactivates a space within

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[50] "Nós estávamos no mesmo lugar, e quando a gente se encontrava a gente se abraçava e conversava, mas Edileusa estava fazendo as coisas dela e eu as minhas." (Bispo; my translation)

[51] "Mais uma vez Edileusa se colocando e se posicionando como uma pessoa que tem uma militância política mesmo. Eu achei a surpresa do ano e a melhor coisa que aconteceu pra mim porque a gente se juntou. São funcionários do núcleo artístico, dançarinas que estavam cada uma num canto, porque a escola realmente não se interessa pela gente nesse sentido. Interessa em outro sentido mas nesse sentido nunca teve um acolhimento, 'Não vamos botar elas pra trabalhar em processos artísticos com algum grupo, junto.' Então isso é muito importante enquanto articulação política de grupo." (Santana; my translation)

[52] Lêda Ornelas also worked as part of the staff but, when the project was conceived, she had already left the country to work on her M.A. in Argentina.

academia for their development and actions as creators, performers, and choreographers. According to Santana, the group makes them stronger when confronting the daily challenges faced within that institution and is fundamental to their permanence there. To highlight the importance of a mutual support they find in the group, Santana uses the example of a faculty member who tried to develop a work related to Brazilian popular dance in 2004. Although the professor demonstrated that she had competency to thrive in that school, "it was too much pressure and she did not endure, she was alone"[53] (Santana).

Santos's contrast in that institution lies precisely in her endurance, leadership, and ability to connect ideas, people, and groups from inside and outside the UFBA Dance School. I argue that throughout the last thirty years she has operated as an activist-artist within academia by helping to create an alternative route of activities that allows dancers (students, faculty, staff members) with an African-based interest and/or background to access knowledge and to develop their skills related to black culture and art in that space. This alternative route that runs concomitant to the official curriculum—and, in one exceptional case became a part of it with the Dance of Black Expression (2001–2014) course that she taught—also creates opportunities for black identity affirmation. Santos was involved in numerous projects, including: 1) The group Odundê (1984–1993); this includes the time she worked as a dancer-choreographer-director with the group under the artistic direction of Castro, as well as the period after Castro stepped down as the group's director in 1991. At that time, Castro designated the four dancers—Santos, Ramos,

[53] "Ela entrou aqui em 2004 mas saiu. Foi muita pressão e ela não aguentou. Era ela sozinha." (Santana)

Bispo, and Ornelas—to be the new proponents of the group (Motta 72). Thus, these dancer-choreographers assumed the responsibility for themselves. However, as permanent staff members they were required to have an associate professor to endorse the project and represent the group. They then invited Neusa Saad[54] and Suzanna Martins[55] to direct the group (Motta 72), although all were involved with the group's internal politics and operation; 2) the NEAB (1997–2002, period when the NEAB was in existence), or Núcleo de Estudos Afro-Brasileiros (Center for Afro-Brazilian Studies), was designed and coordinated by Santos and involved the production of seminars, workshops, and annual dance community encounters. The events allowed the national and international exchange of artists and ideas as well; 3) she organized the *Movimento em Bate Papo: Memória da Dança na Bahia* (Movement in Conversation: Memory of Dance in Bahia) (2012–2013), a series of seminars that facilitated dialogue between students of the UFBA Dance School and important artists who contributed to the field of dance in Bahia; 4) she developed and taught "Dance of Black Expression," a course for undergraduate students as part of the official curriculum (2001-2014); 5) she was the creator of *Mulheres do Asé: Performance Ritual* (*Asé* Women: Ritual Performance) (2016–2019), a piece focusing on the fundamental participation of *Iyalorixás* (Candomblé priestesses) in the history of Afro-Brazilian cultural formation.

Her most recent project, *Mulheres do Asé*: *Performance Ritual*, had a specific impact on black women as an opportunity for reconnection among themselves and as a

[54] Neusa Saad is a professor at UFBA Dance School since the 180s and has taught Danças Folclóricas for more than thirty years there.

[55] Suzana Martins is Assistant professor at the Federal University of Bahia dedicated to Afro-Brazilian related researches within the school but teaches theoretical and creative disciplines.

way to connect to the voices and history of *Iyalorixás*, "women [who are] symbols of resistance, black affirmation, and of the combat against religious intolerance" (Rezende 14) in Brazil. The piece was proposed to be part of the dance school's sixtieth anniversary, but it was ultimately approved by PROEXT (Pró-Reitoria de Extensão, or Office of the Vice-Dean for Extension Courses), a department at UFBA responsible for the coordination, development, promotion, and connection of extra-curricular activities. The performance of the piece was part of an agenda of PROEXT events celebrating UFBA's seventieth anniversary.[56] Because the project was intended to be financially supported by the institution (either by the UFBA Dance School or PROEXT) in which their hours spent on the project would be deducted from the employees' total hours for the week, Santos envisioned working only with staff members from UFBA Dance School and the UFBA Music and Theater Schools. The one exception was Fátima Carvalho, a dancer and actress who had worked with Odundê periodically in the past and who currently works as a dance instructor in public elementary schools. Alongside the choreographer (Santos) and rehearsal director (myself), two black women, the cast featured four black women dancers and one poet, who also danced in the piece, and four musicians (two black men, a white woman, and a white man), two of whom were from the UFBA Dance School, one from Music School, and one from the Theater School.

Given my participant observation, having worked as rehearsal director with the group and using this experience as a lens for my analysis, I examine three aspects that

[56] In 2016 the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) was celebrating seventy years of existence while its Dance School was celebrating sixty years of existence.

characterize this project's relevance not only to the academic and dance community but also to Bahian/Brazilian society in general. First, I highlight the pertinence of the discussion around the important contribution of "*asé* women"—using the definition above by Rezende—who have confronted and challenged racial, gender, and religious oppression in Brazil in different ways. The years of 2016–2019 have been marked by an increase in the number of violent attacks against Afro-Brazilian religious practitioners and their houses by members and leaders of Christian Pentecostal churches. By opening up space that values and acknowledges the importance of these women in the formation of Brazilian culture, Santos responds artistically to a very important socio-political issue. First, during the creative process, Santos personally interviewed several *asé* women; their testimonies both inspired the development of the choreography and were exhibited throughout the piece. Their voices are in evidence and reveal much about their understanding of their role in society and the history of African influence and heritage in Brazil. Second, the composition is also collaborative in its character, guided by Santos but also relying upon performers' creative interventions by suggesting movement "cells" and melodies inspired by the images, stories, and other references offered by Santos. Improvisation was the main method employed by Santos to encourage their investigations. In addition, Candomblé and the Orixás offered the main elements for their explorations. Finally, there is a respect for individuals within the collective and for the preservation of performers' autonomy in rehearsals and in the scene itself. Santos intentionally invited mature women, in their fifties, with lived and professional experience: some, practitioners of Candomblé; others with no experience as practitioners

of Candomblé; all of them possessing a general knowledge acquired throughout their careers as dancers and through a culture that is strongly informed by elements of this religion.

Alongside the positive reception of the piece by the audience, the creative process was particularly significant for those who were involved in it. The testimonies of the dancers demonstrate how they were affected by this process.

> Edileusa's work made it possible for my experience as a *filha-de-santo* [daughter-of-saint, or practitioner of Candomblé] to be artistically re-created for the first time. This is very good because this is my lived experience outside [this space] in relation to this [African] heritage. A heritage that is everyone's, that is in Bahian culture, in Brazilian [culture], but which I had never experienced [within academia in a dance piece]. (Santana)

> I see that *Mulheres do Asé* has the same potential as Odundê at this time in our lives. She [Santos] came in at the right moment indeed. It [the piece] entered like a "phallus."[57] The moment I walked onstage with *Mulheres do Asé* was the same as when I walked onstage with Odundê.[58] (Bispo)

> My identification with this piece is exactly the possibility that I have of being myself in this moment as an artist, as a woman, as a dancer, and as a subject in the fullest sense. […] This piece accepts my age and my expressive ability at this age […] This piece allowed me to access memories. Memories of how I was raised and the memories of my family's black women and the way they behaved and became examples for my own construction as a black woman.[59] (Carvalho)

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[57] Bispo offers an interesting use of the term and image of a "phallus" in relation to Asé Women and in relation to Santos and her work. I will discuss her understanding of this idea while analyzing the piece in Chapter 3.

[58] "Eu vejo que as *Mulheres do Asé* tem o mesmo potencial do Odundê nesses momento de nossas vidas. Ela entrou realmente no momento certo. Ela entrou como um falo. É o mesmo sentimento que eu tive quando eu entrei no palco com o Odundê que eu tive no momento em que eu entrei no palco com Mulheres do Asé" (Bispo; my translation).

[59] Minha identificação com este espetáculo é exatamente pela possibilidade que eu tenho de ser eu mesma, nesse momento como artista, como mulher, como dançarina e como sujeito num sentido complete. Esse espetáculo aceita minha idade e minha abilidade expressiva nessa idade.Esse espetáculo me permitiu acessar memórias de como eu fui criada e das mulheres negras da minha família e do modo como elas se comportavam e se tornaram exemplos para a minha própria construção como mulher negra" (Carvalho; my translation).

The overlapping of personal and professional experiences in an artistic re-creation, the freedom for black dancers to express themselves as they were with their embodied memories, were aspects that Santana, Bispo, and Carvalho observed in the process of creating and performing *Mulheres do Asé*. By comparing her moment of emergence with Odundê to her current experience, Bispo aims to refer to the potential found in the "freedom to express herself without any concern about a standard to follow" (Bispo) and to the possibility of revealing that "those [black] bodies are the bodies of people who can dance as much as those who dance other styles" (Bispo). As a complement to this, Carvalho's reference to accessing memories is understood as an extension of the self.

Despite the fact these women do not present their sexuality at the fore front when talking about their identities, their heterosexuality[60] does not limit their perceptions in terms of their own expression of masculinity. In making reference to the "phallus" - and Bispo declared she wanted to have that masculinity and phallic energy represented in the piece - she claims for a power and audacious aspect generally associated to men and men's sexuality. I explain later how Bispo describes the meanings of this phallus for her but here I highlight that in certain way, the claim for a phallus is also a claim for the erotic; an erotic power in a sense Audre Lorde refers to. In "The Uses of the Erotic: Erotic as Power," Lorde refers to erotic not only emphasizing the existing and misrepresented women's sexual power, but she also uses erotic in a way it can be

[60] Although in previous casts of Odundê there were lesbians in the group, even as a minority, in *Mulheres do Asé*'s cast, all the women identify as heterosexual.

understood and employed in a broader sense referring to a "fullness" in women's actions as she describes:

> For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. Once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, we can then observe which of our various life endeavors brings us closest to that fullness. (Lorde 88)

Another project that had an important influence on expanding the borders of UFBA Dance School by allowing "dancelogues" between academics and artists from Salvador, Bahia, and the world, was the creation of the Center for Afro-Brazilian Studies, or NEAB. By understanding "dancelogues" as "transnational connections and cultural exchange" I argue that the events promoted by NEAB encouraged "bodily, cultural, and spiritual conversations or approximations among artists in the African Diaspora,"[61] specifically among artists from the Dance School, the Salvador community, and artists from the U.S. Through NEAB, Santos invited professors from other schools such as Jaime Sodré and Ubiratã Castro to present seminars and round-table discussions, which facilitated communication among students, professors, and staff members from different areas of study. Moreover, there was the *Arrastão dançante* ("dancing walk"), an annual parade-like event that between 2000 and 2002 mobilized dancers and musicians from Salvador, especially those involved with black social movements, the *bloco afro* cultural groups[62], and dancers from other dance schools such as FUNCEB (Escola de Dança da

[61] This quotes are in an upcoming publication.

[62] A *bloco afro* is the term given to community groups that use music and dance to promote African and Afro-Brazilian heritage and culture.

Fundação Cultural do Estado da Bahia, or Bahia State Cultural Fund Dance School). This event included the temporary construction of an outdoor stage where dancers and musicians performed before leaving for the march around the neighborhood where the event was taking place.

Santos's partnership with Jelon Vieira, founder and artistic director of Dance Brazil, was key for the expansion of UFBA Dance School students and members beyond national borders. An alliance between NEAB and the Capoeira Foundation (a non-profit organization run by Vieira) made it possible for U.S dancer-choreographers to visit the UFBA Dance School and for Brazilian dancers to travel to the U.S. Bill T. Jones, Cleo Parkinson, and Denise Jefferson, the then-director of Alvin Ailey Dance School, came to teach workshops in Salvador through the 2000 Festival de Dança e Capoeira (Dance and Capoeira Festival) that attracted more than fifty students per class from UFBA Dance School and from the wider dance community in Salvador. In 2000, Jefferson and the Alvin Ailey Dance School offered fellowships to five students whom she had selected during her classes to attend a Summer Intensive Program and receive a year of tuition at the Alvin Ailey School, a unique opportunity for Brazilian students. It was through this opportunity that some of the Brazilian dancers began to forge closer ties to the United States, expanding their artistic connections and job opportunities.

Despite the importance of *Mulheres do Asé*, NEAB, and Santos's years of teaching as part of the official curriculum, as I detailed in the previous section, her daily actions of teaching extra-curricular classes in Afro-Bahian dance, and her advocacy for the inclusion of African-derived content and greater inclusion of Afro-Brazilians at the

UFBA Dance School have been crucial for achievements of a black dance community in academia. As Santana asserts,

> She [Santos] is a warrior, isn't she? A damn militant! If she weren't here […] I say this because when I began teaching undergraduates by drawing from my research on capoeira, it was only possible because she had opened a path here at the undergraduate studies program. She positioned herself. She was at the forefront of the NEAB [Center for Afro-Brazilian Studies]. She was close to the student body, departments and departments' coordinators, and the direction [of the dance school], emphasizing that it was important to include this content that the curriculum had never…and until now had never […] Without Edileusa I would never have been part of the undergraduate studies program and I would not have developed the methodology that I have today and which I believe is very important.[63] (Santana)

In Santana's testimony it is worth noticing that Santos is speaking for herself and for other black subjects working in academia. In this case specifically, other black women who have resisted the dance school's history of rejection, denial, and lack of attention to Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Bahian influences as well as black subjects. By engaging with one of the main ideas presented in the essays published by Gabriella Gutierrez y Muhs et. al in *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia,* I argue that Santos is not only surviving, but also thriving in academia. In spearheading projects and initiatives at the UFBA Dance School that bring to light the presence of black dancer-researchers who have helped shape black diasporic dance in Bahia—dancer-researchers from inside and outside the school—Santos is subtly and

[63] "Ela é uma guerreira, né? Uma militante da porra!! Se não fosse ela aqui… Tanto é que quando eu entrei pra dar aula na graduação a partir da minha pesquisa com a capoeira, foi porque ela já tinha iniciado um caminho aqui na graduação. Ela se colocou. Ela estava à frente do NEAB. Aí ela se colocou junto aos orgãos do colegiado, departamentos, e direção, ressaltando que era importante incluir esses conteúdos que o curriculo nosso nunca … e até hoje nunca […] se não fosse Edileusa eu nunca teria ido pra graduação e não teria desenvolvido uma metodologia que hoje eu tenho e que acho muito interessante." (Santana; my translation)

gradually contributing to a continuing presence and dialogue among students, researchers, professional dancers and musicians, professors, staff members, and others about Afro-diasporic cultures and peoples. In addition, Santos encourages other black women to keep working in that hostile space and resisting the challenges they face; challenges that are often imperceptible to white men and white women.

SILVESTRE AND THE FORGING OF BLACK DANCE DIASPORA: FROM SALVADOR TO THE WORLD

Brazil in the late 1940s and early 1950s was marked by artist-activists and intellectuals working together and speaking out to dismantle the myth of racial democracy and counteracting hegemonic discourses founded on the ideas of miscegenation and a "whitening" of the population. This collaboration was especially evident in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in that period. It was in Rio de Janeiro that artist-activists such as Abdias do Nascimento, Solano Trindade, Margarida Trindade, Darci Monteiro Abigail Moura, Edson Carneiro, Haroldo Costa, and Mercedes Batista founded the first Afro-Brazilian-centered theater and concert dance companies, such as Orquestra Afro-Brasileira (1942), Teatro Experimental do Negro –TEN (1944), Teatro Popular Brasileiro (1950, later known as Brasiliana), and Balé Folclórico Mercedes Baptista (1953). The new aesthetics that were emerging from these groups, drawing primarily from Afro-Brazilian religions and popular dances, contrasted against the few individual initiatives from the 1930s that incorporated elements from Afro-Brazilian rituals and popular dances in secondary plane as a way to create a "Brazilian" mestizo identity, something which could be observed in works by Carmen Miranda, Felicitas Barreto, and

Eros Volusia. Works from the 1940 and 1950s incorporated the same Afro-Brazilian elements as the prevalent characteristics of an art form that would value and affirm black aesthetics.

Furthermore, in 1930s and 1940s theatrical and concert dance, whiteness reinforced discourses that defended the prevalence of European heritage over African and Indigenous features. Black bodies were not allowed to perform in theatrical venues; in exceptional cases they were allowed to be on stage, such as in the performances of Felicitas Barreto and Eros Volusia, where black performers were presented as commodified or reaffirmed stereotypes that associated those dancers with primitivism and savagery (Ferraz 157). It was in the 1950s and 1960s that black bodies started to enter those spaces, in particular through the door of the "folkloric," even when the work revealed characteristics of a modern dance style, as observed in Mercedes Baptista's technique and choreography.

In 1950s Salvador, Bahia, the presence of black bodies in informal settlings and theatrical venues was propelled by a national priority given to the development of a tourist industry (Hölfling 98) that explored the "exoticism" of that culture and invested in a sort of authenticity. As Ana Paula Hölfling (2015) argues, the valorization of authenticity of "the folk" relied particularly on "the presence of racially marked bodies on stage" (99). Capoeira masters and popular dancers received the status of "folklore holders" (Hölfling 100) and started to perform and teach the particularities of their arts in shows for foreign audiences within, and sometimes outside of, Salvador and Brazil. If on the one hand this promotion of Afro-Bahian popular dances and dancers was anchored in

the commodification of black culture and black bodies, on the other hand it created opportunities for the emergence and consolidation of dance companies that in some cases "straddled the artistic and the folkloric" (Hölfling 99), such as the example of the Conjunto Folclórico Viva Bahia (Viva Bahia Folkloric Ensemble).

The Viva Bahia Folkloric Ensemble, founded in 1962 and directed by the ethnomusicologist Emília Biancardi, was one of the first groups to enable dancers and *capoeiristas* (practitioners of capoeira) from Salvador to tour Europe and the United States, including Jelon Vieira, Loremil Machado, Mestre King, Mestre João Grande, Ninho Reis, and Walson Botelho (Vavá), among others. A few of these dancers decided to return to Brazil and develop their own works after touring with Viva Bahia, such as Mestre King, Ninho Reis and Walson Botelho; other dancers and *capoeiristas*, however, decided to move to other countries after the tour, seeking an opportunity to have a better life, which for them meant a life in which they could survive as artists. Their search for a better life was motivated by the contradictory reality of being valued in internationalist discourses while remaining socially and politically marginalized in their home country (Hölfling). This paradoxical experience is a challenge still faced by black Brazilians today, particularly for those (black Brazilians) dark-skinned black bodies who live between the "state's celebration of black culture and the state's routine killing [literal and symbolic] of the black body" (Smith 3). As Christen Smith noted about this "Afro-Paradise" of Bahia,

> There is a paradoxical relationship between Bahia's identity as an exotic, black, jovial playland where anyone, especially tourists, can enjoy black culture and black people, and the state's use of terror against the very black bodies that

> ostensibly produce this exotic space – Afro-*paradise*. This gendered, sexualized, and racialized imaginary has made the region a sizzling tourist industry on the one hand, and fueled the violent repression of black bodies on the other. (Smith 3)

Although Smith's analysis is contemporary, it is pertinent to look at black subjects' experiences since the initial growth of the tourist industry in Bahia, given that the experience of black people in Bahia has been marked by this contradiction for years. In the 1960s and 1970s, the country's behavior during the military dictatorship was even more extreme and aggressive with blacks (Napolitano).

Brazil experienced two different dictatorships: one during the Getúlio Vargas Era (1930-1945) and another under the military intervention of João Goulart (1964 -1985). If the Vargas era explored politics of populism and nationalism for industrial growth within a global scenario, the military dictatorship (1964 – 1985) engaged with severe repression and arbitrary laws aimed at accelerating capitalism and "national integration of Brazil's vast territory" (Napolitano 1). President Getúlio Vargas (1888–1954) used the apparent or symbolic "valorization" of blacks, extolling popular cultural expressions to attract the sympathy of black people who would serve as workers in his project of industrial growth. As Jens R. Hentschke observes, Vargas "knew that the adoption and adjustment of an alternative political model at national level depended decisively on gaining cultural hegemony" (19). Thus, his dictatorship wanted to "please" the Brazilian people in general, and it involved rare confrontations with left-wing political groups. In contrast, the military dictatorship was marked by confrontation, torture, and exile. As Marcos Napolitano describes:

> The military passed arbitrary laws and severely repressed left-wing political groups and social movements while also seeking to accelerate capitalist development and the "national integration" of Brazil's vast territory. They intended to modernize Brazilian industry and carry out bold infrastructure projects. On the other hand, they faced strong opposition from civil society, led by political groups, artists, intellectuals, and press outlets of diverse ideological backgrounds (Marxists, liberals, socialists, and progressive Catholics). These groups were divided between total refusal to negotiate with the military and critical adherence to the policies of the general's governments, composing a complex relationship between society and state. (Napolitano 1)

The tension and arbitrary actions of the state were very aggressive toward artists and became an important reason for several of them to leave Brazil. The practice of capoeira in public spaces, for example, was under surveillance and could culminate in the *capoeiristas'* arrest if the militaries suspected them of any conspiracy or political affiliation (Napolitano). Jelon Vieira, a capoeira master and performer known as the first artist to bring capoeira to the U.S. in the 1970s, describes his own experiences:

> As a teenager, I lived under a military dictatorship regime in Brazil. When I was 18, I started losing friends who had not been involved in any political movements. They just came under suspicion, and the government took them, and I never saw them again. That got me very angry, and I wanted to leave the country […] I really wanted to come to the United States. I was fascinated by the U.S. because of jazz, the blues. The situation with the Brazilian government started building up inside me, and I wanted to leave the country. Finally, I made it for a tour to Europe, and I left Brazil in March '74. ("Jelon Vieira")

It was after one of his trips with Viva Bahia that Vieira, along with his fellow performer Loremil Machado, moved to Paris, London, and later to New York to start a new life and an intensified period of dance migrations between Bahia and the U.S. Vieira founded the group Capoeiras of Bahia in 1977, a company that maintained a more traditional dance style following the steps of Viva Bahia. Alongside Biancardi's first push toward New York, through an invitation for him to perform in the play *Parto* in 1973, Vieira also

counted on the fundamental support of Ellen Stewart and Alvin Ailey, who encouraged him to invest in his unique work not only as a grassroots group but as a non-profit organization. In 1980 Vieira founded the Capoeira Foundation "to promote Afro-Brazilian cultural forms, particularly dance and music, through educational, presenting, and producing activities" ("NEA"). The dance company received a new name suggested by Ailey: Dance Brazil. And, with the status of a non-profit organization and the influence of the board members, the company grew in terms of funding and visibility within the U.S. ("NEA").

In the first decade of their work, Vieira and Machado directed the group that was composed of Brazilian dancers and *capoeiristas* based in New York and U.S. dancers interested in working with that culture. Between 1977 and 1991 most of the choreographies were composed by Nem Brito (a Brazilian dancer-choreographer who lived in New York), Vieira, and Machado. In 1993, Vieira decided to start working only with choreographers and dancers based in Brazil. The decision to cover the costs of rehearsals in Brazil, flights, and accommodations for choreographers and dancers during the long tours in the U.S. was linked to his desire to re-establish the company's "Brazilianness," a Brazilianness he felt had been diluted throughout the years he worked only with U.S-based dancers.[64] Vieira's notion of "authentic Brazilianess" is related to an embodied knowledge acquired through a continuous dialogue with a local lived experience.

[64] This information is based on conversations I had with Jelon Vieira during the time I was working with Dance Brazil (1997–2006).

The year 1992 was key in the process of transitioning from staging the traditional and re-creating the traditional. Vieira invited Silvestre, who was living in Brazil at that time, to choreograph and the composer and singer Geronimo Duarte to create the soundtrack for the piece called *Tenda dos Milagres* (Tent of Miracles). In re-establishing his ties with Brazil through a collaboration with a Brazilian-based choreographer and composer, Vieira started to facilitate subsequent migrations—mostly temporary but in few cases permanent—of Brazilian dancers, *capoeiristas*, and musicians.

When Silvestre was invited to choreograph with Dance Brazil she had already gained visibility in Salvador as a dance teacher. According to Silvestre, although she had experience as a choreographer during the time she was working with Odundê, she had never choreographed a piece by herself, since the process in Odundê was always collective. Concomitant to her undergraduate studies and performances as a dancer-choreographer-director with Odundê between 1981 and 1989, Silvestre had started to build the basis of her technique while teaching Afro-Brazilian contemporary dance for a general audience at UFBA. In addition, Silvestre was part of the initial core group of professors at FUNCEB, founded in 1984 (Cultural). Her work gained much visibility among Salvador's dance community and some U.S. and European dancers who came to Salvador attracted by the tourist industry during that period. Due to its large number of black, African-descendent citizens and African heritage, Salvador, Bahia was considered a "museum of Afro-Brazilian traditions" (Suarez 155). As Ana Paula Hölfling (2015) asserts, "Bahia—one of the first Brazilian states to develop a tourism industry—has become one of Brazil's main cultural tourism destinations, featuring Afro-Brazilian

culture as its main touristic attraction" (98). Despite the association of Bahia as a museum of Afro-Brazilian traditions, "far from being a static museum space of authentic Afro-Bahian culture, Bahia [was and still] is a dynamic space-subject to continuing reform and change" (Suarez 159), a space of constant recreation and reinvention of the bodies' ways of moving, sounds, relations, rhythms, and identities. It was within this scenario that Barbara Browning, for example, was introduced to Silvestre's dancing before 1987. Browning describes her experience by saying:

> Her [Silvestre's] classes were advertised as dança afro-brasileira contemporânea, but her style was distinctive and highly specific. While there was certainly a sense of exuberance in the hall, it wasn't the dispersed joy of a typical "folkloric" class. There was an acute focus to both the playing and the motion. I recognized the gestural references to the movement iconography of the orixás, the West African deities who manifest themselves in the danced ceremonies of the Candomblé religion as it's practiced in Brazil. But these gestures were somewhat abstracted, clarified, and sharpened. I became Silvestre's student, and she was without a doubt one of the most detail-oriented and stylistically coherent movement practitioners I've ever had the opportunity to train with. (Browning 171-172)

Browning's words call attention to Silvestre's distinctive quality in her dance training and also indicate her continuing connection with Silvestre by stating, "I became Silvestre's student."

In 1992 Silvestre traveled with Dance Brazil to New York as choreographer-performer-teacher. Her choreography, *Tenda dos Milagres*, a choreography inspired by a novel with the same title written by Jorge Amado, which tells the story of Pedro Archanjo, a male sociologist from Bahia who confronts prejudice in Salvador "avoiding the triumph of police and a racist elite" (Tenda dos Milagres). Although in the novel there are remnants of a discourse of racial mixture and religious syncretism, the book questions

white violence against African-derived rituals; a relevant social issue to be discussed and denounced transnationally through distinct means. Candomblê, capoeira, and samba are also explored in both the novel and the choreography, but Archanjo's important confrontations are represented in both narratives as well. A sign of a critique to Silvestre's choreographic option of emphasizing Archanjo's struggles can be found in Jack Anderson's assertion that "once the story was told, this company, directed by Jelon Vieira, was able to rejoice in the dances of Bahia" (Anderson "Dance in Review"). Anderson's review in the *New York Times* alternates between moments of appreciation, specifically while talking about capoeira, and critique when referring to the storytelling. I speculate that this critic's comments reflect his personal reaction to a perception of a new trend that was emerging in Dance Brazil's aesthetics and which contrasted somewhat with previous shows that highlighted only the "exhilarating" Bahian culture and its "festivities." I argue that Silvestre's piece anticipates a change in the dance company's aesthetic choices, one that reveals more explicit "modern sensibilities" (Desmond 54) and touches on socio-political issues as part of the themes approached through dance.

Jane C. Desmond's analysis of a Dance Brazil performance on the television show series "Alive from Off Center" in 1989 reveals that although there was an effort by the program's announcer to find elements of cultural contact in this company's aesthetic, which according to the announcer is "reinterpreting traditional dances" (Desmond 54), in fact, on that occasion, Dance Brazil demonstrated that "[i]n live and televised appearances, this is a company that 'stages' tradition" (Desmond 54). As Desmond describes:

> Their repertory consists of what appear to be staging of ritual ceremonies based on the Afro-Brazilian *candomble* religion, traditional *capoeira* (a martial arts-dance form), the samba, and, to some extent, dance vocabulary derived from American modern dance styles. (54)

Desmond observes that economic and political power of the U.S. operated through the TV program's staging choices that isolated the work of the company in terms of time and space by "folklorizing" it. I speculate that this tying to the traditional brings to light characteristics of a period in which the company was striving to affirm its work and its foreign artistic identity within the U.S. cultural environment. This attempt to succeed involved an attachment to the roots and traditions which prevailed over transformation or re-creation during that time.

The informal style of Dance Brazil's show at the 1988 Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival is also a sign of the company's performance of the traditional, since the more informal environment in which they presented the popular dances more closely approximated the way they are performed in non-theatrical spaces. As Jack Anderson describes in the *New York Times*, informal presentations preceded indoor performances and "appropriately, Tuesday's outdoor event consisted of examples of *maculelê* and *capoeira* by another talented New York-based company, Dance Brazil, directed by Jelon Vieira" (Anderson "Special to the New York Times"). This Dance Brazil show certainly differed considerably from the indoor venues in which the company would perform a few years later.

With Silvestre's piece, Vieira finally started to incorporate into his dance company an aspect that actually drove him toward his career as artistic director and

choreographer: creations that reflected the socio-political realities of his country. As Vieira narrates:

> When I was a boy in Brazil, I saw a dance company that up to today was the best dance company I have ever seen in my whole life. It was all women. At that time in Brazil, it was rare to see a man dancing, especially in Bahia. The dance was about the dictatorship that was going on in Brazil. I didn't understand it completely, but I understood that they tried to say something through movement. My mother later explained to me, "You know they were talking about the dictatorship, and since in the dictatorship, they can't speak, they talked through movement." You had to be an adult to understand that, but I liked the expression. I liked the movements, and that stayed in my mind. I didn't want to be a dancer myself. I just wanted to form that movement. Later on, I found out that it was called choreography. (Vieira)

Vieira's desire to talk "through movement" about lived experience and the socio-political context finally started to become part of Dance Brazil's aesthetics. This trend that started to be announced through *Tenda dos Milagres* became more apparent in Vieira's work when he started to hold auditions and rehearsals in Salvador, Bahia, by hiring, with rare exceptions[65], Brazilian-based choreographers, dancers, and musicians. In 1993, Vieira proposed to the Capoeira Foundation's board members a project to work between North and South America, or more specifically between the U.S. and Brazil, and it was in that year that the piece *Pivete*, which told the story of children living on the streets of some Brazilian cities, was created (Vieira). The piece was a huge critical success and the creative process involved ethnography which allowed Vieira, Marcelo Moacyr (the choreographer), and the dancers to meet some of those street children and talk to them. The lived experience in Brazil provided dancers with prior knowledge of

[65] Djassi Jhonson in 1998, Carlos Durval in 2000, Marcelo Zarvus in 2001, and Bambi in 2015.

that topic and reality, the ethnography, and the performance of a piece that revealed to the U.S. audience an aspect of Brazilian society that was not often shown. The experience was also crucial for the success of the piece and justified the Capoeira Foundation's investment in bringing dancers, choreographers, and musicians who were based in Brazil to tour the U.S. and return home after every tour.

Silvestre's *Tenda dos Milagres* was her first choreography and served as a sort of harbinger of change in Dance Brazil. The piece was a success at St. Mark's Church in the Bowery, and later when it was re-staged and performed in venues such as the Prospect Park Bandshell (July 19, 1993) and Lincoln Center. While Dance Brazil was performing in New York and her work as a choreographer started to gain recognition, Silvestre was studying U.S. and African dances and forging relationships with other dancer-choreographer-instructors, companies, musicians, and universities. U.S. dance companies she has choreographed for since that time include the Ballet Hispanico Repertory Company and the American Academy of Ballet in New York, NY; Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble (CPRD Ensemble) in Denver, CO; Muntu Dance Theater of Chicago in Chicago, IL; and Kendra Kimbrough Dance Company (KKDC) in San Francisco, CA. In addition to U.S. dance companies, Silvestre has worked with Brazilian companies based in the U.S. such as Roots of Brazil in New York, NY, directed by Ligia Barreto, and Viver Brasil in Los Angeles, CA, directed by Linda Yudin and Natalie Marrero.

Silvestre's experiences in the U.S. had a direct impact on the opportunities that emerged for her in Salvador. An acquired knowledge of West African dance (which was not that easy to access in Brazil) and U.S. modern dance influenced her creation of the

most popular piece in the repertory of the Balé Folclórico da Bahia (BFB), *Afixirê* (1996). As Silvestre describes: "I studied many traditional dances and techniques in the U.S. and I was full, wanting to share them. In the Balé Folclórico [da Bahia] I had the chance to inject [them]"[66] (Silvestre). Although the BFB carries a name that refers to a "folkloric" content, this company's practice gave Silvestre and other choreographers the freedom to train and explore dancers' movement vocabulary in the way that he/she wanted. Silvestre trained the dancers, most of whom came from a capoeira background, in her technique and in West African dances. In addition to the classes she took in the U.S., the Ballet National la Linguére in Senegal's visit to Salvador inspired Silvestre's creation of a choreography that openly wanted to honor the African dances.[67] Walson Botelho, general director of the BFB, asked Silvestre to compose a choreography to open the show, but when he saw the piece he said, "This piece is the one that will close the show" (Silvestre). Indeed, *Afixirê* became the most popular choreography of the BFB and has been performed worldwide, receiving applause from audiences everywhere from its inception to present day.

The year that Silvestre lived in New York and her travels between Brazil and the U.S. allowed her to create links and connections that remain strong. After *Afixirê*, Silvestre traveled back to the U.S. to choreograph with other companies and she participate in festivals with Alvin Ailey, Merce Cunningham, and Bill T. Jones, among others. These encounters inspired her. One of her important encounters was with Steve

[66] "Estudei muito danças tradicionais e técnicas nos Estados Unidos e eu estava cheia, querendo doar. No Balé Folclórico eu tive a chance de injetar." (Silvestre; my translation)
[67] This information is based on the testimony of Bahian dancer-choreographers Claudia Guedes, and Silvestre.

Coleman. Silvestre's collaboration with the renowned U.S. jazz musician has been transformative for the artistic creations of both artists. As Barbara Browning argues, from this collaboration a new way of body-movement and music emerges onstage while also questioning gender hierarchies. Coleman's invitation for Silvestre's composition, in which she is not only participating in "little dance interludes" but also "remaining on stage" with the other [male] musicians reflects on the artists' positionalities and questions that predominately male-occupied stage. Silvestre becomes instrumental and formative in that "unique texture" (Browning 174). As Browning asserts: "Her inclusion in that musical texture was profoundly moving to me, and that its ramifications went beyond simply blurring the boundary between dance and music. It struck me that the gender politics implicit in that move were deep" (174).

Throughout more than twenty years of collaboration these artists gave birth to a new way of making jazz music-dance. Silvestre's reference to the elements of the nature as a way to give Coleman's access to the Orixás' symbology that inspires her dancing and Coleman's "attentiveness to motion as another rhythmic mode of instrumentality" (177) facilitates the creation of a symbolic language that supports their ongoing "talking." Silvestre's connection with Coleman became a solid bridge between countries, cultures, art fields, and creative potentials. As Silvestre says: "Steve Coleman and I have a permanent connection. I don't need to be working with him on the stage to maintain an exchange of ideas. Our communication is continuous. I have a great respect for his work—that one is—he's a genius" (Silvestre in Browning 173).

This "permanent connection" Silvestre has established with Coleman and other artists around the world reveals a lot about the potential of artistic and academic productions that can emerge from international and transnational encounters, exchanges, and migrations. Browning is an artist-scholar who has an important connection with Silvestre as well. This connection was established thanks to the crossing of their paths between Bahia and New York throughout the years. Both Silvestre's interest and travels to the U.S. and Browning's interest and travels through Brazil enabled the development of academic essays on Brazilian dance and Silvestre's critical reflection on her own practices.[68]

The opportunities to choreograph in the U.S. did not open the same number of doors opened by Silvestre's teaching, at least not in her view. As Silvestre says. "I think I had to do a foundational work of training the ones who were starting. To choreograph for major companies [in the U.S.], it never happened" (Silvestre). Although the recognition of her technique on a large scale was something she gradually achieved, according to her it is worth noticing that she developed a primary focus around Silvestre Technique in her own career. Currently, Silvestre's choreographies are composed with the groups that participate in her programs and workshops. Her presence at the California Brazil Camp and the New Orleans Dance Festival, as well as at the Intensive Programs in Salvador,

[68] This information is based on two essays published by Barbara Browning and the conversations I had with Silvestre during the workshops in 2017.

are marked by final performances in which the participants perform a choreography that is created over the course of her workshops.[69]

Indeed, the development of Silvestre Technique and her Afro-Brazilian-based pedagogy "in between" Brazil and the U.S. provided tools for the expansion of her dancing throughout the world. Silvestre Technique has facilitated Silvestre's circulation through different contexts and has contributed to the strengthening of a dance diaspora. Alongside the classes she taught at UFBA and Funceb in Salvador during the 1980s, when she traveled to the U.S. her teaching received particular support from Vieira and the Capoeira Foundation. Through the foundation, Silvestre was invited to teach residencies in diverse universities. At the same time, Silvestre relied on Vera Passos, Emilena Oliveira, Deko Alves, and other multipliers in Salvador to maintain the work that was evolving in Brazil and gaining visibility in other countries.

LIVING IN MOTION: SILVESTRE'S BUTTERFLY SPIRIT IN THE FORGING OF DIASPORIC ARTISTIC IDENTITY

I am a little butterfly.

- Rosangela Silvestre, Interview - [70]

[69] In the following websites it is possible to watch excerpts of Silvestre's choreography at the California Brazil Camp Festival.

[70] "Eu sou meio borboleta […]" (Silvestre; my translation).

Oyá e Sòngò viviam juntos nesta fase, Òsún e Obà já não ficavam mais tanto com Sòngò devido à ira de Sòngò e os maus tratos que ambas sofriam. Oyá que não leva desaforo para casa e impaciente andava em pé de guerra com o grande Rei que há tempos procurava diversão fora dos limites de seu palácio. Oyá revoltada decidiu fugir, Sòngò quando chegou ao palácio deu por falta de sua esposa. Oyá desesperada e com medo de voltar para Sòngò acabou pedindo ajuda a Èsù, já que os dois sempre se deram muito bem. Oyá deu a Èsù todos os materiais que Ele pediu, e, assim Èsù fez um encantamento para Oyá. Toda vez que sentisse medo. Ela se transformaria em borboleta que é linda, colorida e inofensiva. Sòngò enfurecido e revoltado soltando raios e trovões com a fuga de sua esposa, ao se encontrar com Èsù, Ele lhe disse que não teria visto Oyá. Neste mesmo momento Oyá que estava em sua forma de borboleta observava tudo do alto. Oyá voltando a sua forma de Òrìsà perguntou a Èsù, o porquê de se tornar uma borboleta e não outros elementos da natureza. Èsù lhe respondeu: Como vento e nervosa, você arrasaria o mundo em vendaval. Como raio, você acabaria com as aldeias. Como fogo, você destruiria o mundo. Com os seus filhos Égùn-gùn,

Oyá and Xangô lived together at that time, Oxum and Obá did not spend as much time with Xangô due to his anger and the mistreatment that both suffered. Oyá, who never accepted abusiveness, was impatient and constantly battled with the great king, who for a long time would go looking for fun outside the limits of his kingdom. Revolted, Oyá decided to run away. Xangô, upon returning to his kingdom, missed his wife. Desperate and afraid to return home to Xangô, Oyá asked Exu for help, because they had always had a good relationship. Oyá gave Exu all the things he asked of her, and Exu cast a spell for Oyá. Every time she felt scared she would transform into a butterfly that is pretty, colorful, and harmless. Angry and revolted, Xangô sent thunder and lightning with the escape of his wife. When he met Exu he asked whether he had not seen Oyá. At this moment, Oyá, who was in her butterfly form, observed everything from above. When Oyá became an Orixá again, she asked Exu why she turned into a butterfly instead of other elements of the nature. Exu answered: as the angry wind you would destroy the world in a gale. As lightning you would destroy the villages. As fire you would destroy the world. With your Egun-gun[71] children you would scare humanity. As a

[71] Egun-gun or Egum refers to "the soul of the dead, the ancestors" (Moura 70; my translation). Originally in Portuguese: "as almas dos mortos, os antepassados."

você apavoraria a humanidade. Como borboleta além de manter suas cores e perfumes que simbolizam a sorte, Você também será capaz de voar com suas asas ao sabor do vento, afinal de contas quem em seu juízo perfeito mataria uma bela borboleta?. Èsù deixou o local muito feliz e satisfeito, fez com que Oyá jamais se tornasse presa de alguém. Oyá feliz se transformou outra vez em uma bela borboleta (símbolo de sorte). E saiu através dos ventos….

(Unknown Author 2015)

butterfly, in addition to keeping your colors and perfumes that symbolize good luck, you will also be able to fly with your wings on the wind. After all, who in their right mind would kill a beautiful butterfly? Exu left, glad and satisfied. He guaranteed that Oya would never become someone's prisoner. Happy, Oya transformed into a beautiful butterfly again (a symbol of luck) and flew away on the wind.

(Unknown Author, my translation 2015)

The myth that talks about fear, freedom, being within the limits of a "house-prison," and the unlimited space of the sky, reveals much about Silvestre's comparison of herself to a butterfly. In contrast to Vieira's desire to leave Brazil and establish a new life in another country in the 1970s, Silvestre's self-comparison to a butterfly demonstrates her attraction to living in motion or in between different places. It is in this sense that I understand that her artistic identity is forged in non-fixed territory, albeit her notion of belonging to Afro-Brazilian specific cultural references – Candomblé and Caboclo (Indigenous) - is evidenced in her work.

Silvestre places her behavior as a dancer-choreographer-educator in opposition to what Bill T. Jones suggests as the way he believes it is possible for a choreographer-educator to develop a movement signature or create an artistic legacy. He believes it is possible only if there is a dance company to which the choreographer is linked, "a dance

company that will understand and make that movement vibrate" (Silvestre). By demonstrating her different perspective and interests in her dancing, Silvestre asserts,

> I am a little butterfly and I like to work with dance companies that are around. I travel a lot. I want to have this possibility. I circulate a lot and, nowadays, the model of the intensive [Silvestre Technique Intensive Program] is in various places and I always create the choreographies in the places I travel to teach. I have already gone to various cities and states, and this is what I love. I believe I am in the dance field for this…to [land] where there is someone who wants to dance.[72] (Silvestre)

Although in this fragment of Silvestre's testimony her work with different dance companies is evident, throughout the interview she also emphasizes her interest in non-professional dancers or the "life dancers" as she calls them. When she says she wants to come "where is someone who wants to dance" she is actually referring to a general audience; a general global audience willing to move.

While Vieira and other dancers and *capoeiristas* were particularly moved by a violent military dictatorship during the 1960s and 1970s toward migrations, the socio-political context of the late 1980s and early 1990s was marked by an economic crisis and insecurity about the future of the country that had a minor impact on the dancers' migrations but certainly exerted some influence on their decision making. Neo-liberalism was the prevalent ideology at that time; one of the actions of President Fernando Collor de Mello, elected in 1990, was to confiscate the savings of Brazilian citizens, which contributed to their uncertainty about whether the state would use its power to conduct

[72] "Eu sou meio borboleta e gusto de trabalhar com companhias que estão por aí. Eu viajo muito. Eu quero ter essa possibilidade. Eu circulo muito e agora esse modelo do intensive está em város lugares e os trabalhos coreográficos eu estou fazendo sempre nos lugares onde eu vou dar aula. Eu já fui em vários países, cidades, e estados, e isso e que me encanta. Eu acho que eu estou na dança para isso para poder penetrar onde tiver alguém que queira dançar" (Silvestre; my translation).

these invasive actions in the future, not only in relation to their bank accounts but in other arenas. Although the confiscation affected mostly the middle and upper classes in Brazil, a few artists willing to evolve in their careers and create ways to survive through their art relocated at that time. Armando Pequeno, Isaura Oliveira, Augusto Soledade, and Augusto Omolu are just some examples of artists who left Salvador during that period.

Silvestre's choice to live in motion, borrowing and sharing from multiple places, cultures, histories, politics, and people, suggests a black subject strategy of survival. The concept of alternative axes of action that proposes a reflection about black women's experiences and their strategies to survive and create their own identities within the African diaspora includes the idea of a non-fixed space of action or continuing movement as a way to find balance or, more accurately, as a way to live in between positions of imbalance. I argue that Silvestre's living in motion is her way of playing with instability, negotiating between the alternative axes she creates to thrive in her artistic career. In choosing a life in motion, Silvestre avoids becoming a target for the pushes of the dominant system and society. In Silvestre's reference to the myth cited above, Oya's possibility of transforming into a delicate and free butterfly suggests her own opportunities for moving around and making connections everywhere. It also can suggest her detachment from any fixed territory and ties that make her feel confined to one place.

This continuing movement allowed her to connect not only with the U.S. but also with India, Egypt, Senegal, Cuba, Argentina, France, Canada, and Japan, creating an artistic identity that is diasporic in the sense that it borrows primarily from Afro-Brazilian Candomblé, her lived experiences with her *Caboclo* great-grandparents, and from the

knowledge she acquires while traveling around the world. Moreover, Silvestre's connections—which involve the dissemination of her technique, dance pedagogy, and philosophy—configure a process of diaspora formation: a [black] Brazilian dance diaspora formation. In acknowledging that no other Brazilian dancer-choreographer-instructor has created such an expansive web of multipliers teaching a dance technique in so many places, and whose choreographies have been performed worldwide for so many years.[73] I argue that Silvestre is contributing to the inclusion of Afro-Brazilian dances in the vast landscape of African diaspora dances.

SANTOS AND THE DANCE BRAZIL

Throughout the years that followed the 1993 political-aesthetic change in Dance Brazil, the company started to create its own identity, a transformation in which Santos played an important role. Santos performed as a dancer and teacher of Afro-Brazilian dance in the company for one-and-a-half years during the performance of *Pivete*. As Vieira followed her teaching with the company, he invited her to participate in a residency at the Ilê Bahia de San Antonio cultural center (1995) in San Antonio, Texas, where the company was inaugurating an important space of Brazilian cultural expression based in the U.S. The residency included a final performance with her students. After that, Vieira called Santos to coordinate Dance Brazil's next audition in Brazil and to choreograph for the group, after Marcelo Moacyr's work *Orfeu Negro* (1994). Between 1996 and 2000 Santos was the main choreographer for the group. Her pieces *Quilombos*

[73] Specifically, I refer to Silvestre's works *Afixirê* and *Ginga* (performed by the BFB) and Orixás, In Motion, and Three Wives of Xangô (performed by Viver Brasil).

(1996), *Camará* (1998), *Serra Pelada* (1998), and *Ginga* (2000) were particularly known for addressing the history of black people in Brazil and their struggles for freedom and survival, along with celebrations of Afro-Brazilian capoeira, *maculelê, samba-de-roda*, *mariscada*, *afoxé,* and other popular dances. The movement vocabulary and themes Santos included in her work with the company brought to light a confluence of Afro-Brazilian cultural elements and dance expressions, history, and socio-political engagement, which contrasted with Marcelo Moacyr's lack of experience with Afro-Brazilian dances. *Pivete* (1993) was a piece that received much acclaim from U.S. audiences and critics due to its engagement with socio-political issues and the dancers' convincing performances,[74] a result of their lived experience in Brazil and intentional observation of Brazilian street children. As in *Tenda dos Milagres*, the choreographers—Marcelo Moacyr, Jelon Vieira, and Nem Britto—took their inspiration from a novel by Jorge Amado, *Capitães de Areia*. However, Moacyr's primary exploration of Martha Graham technique in his choreographies did not allow capoeira and Afro-Brazilian dance movements to appear as the main feature of the company's work. Take Me With You (1993), *Timbalada* (1994), and *Orfeu Negro* (1994) were pieces that went unnoticed in the company's repertory (Curriculo Marcelo Moacyr).

One key characteristic of Dance Brazil since its foundation has been the use of capoeira movement language in its pieces, which is anchored in the participation of *capoeiristas* and/or dancers in the cast who have some experience with capoeira. In this sense, capoeira played a fundamental and distinctive role in the company's aesthetics. In

[74] Anderson in New York Times' Dance Review.

the first years of Dance Brazil's works, the division between dancers and *capoeiristas* and their movement styles performed by each were clear. Vieira, who himself in the 1960s-70s took dance classes along with Cesar de Alabama, Eusébio Lobo, and other *capoeiristas* in Salvador, was convinced of the privilege of knowing different movement techniques (Vieira). However, this was not a requirement for the *capoeiristas* who worked with Dance Brazil at that time (1977-1996). When Santos was creating *Quilombos*, this did not change; two *capoeiristas* had specific passages across the stage in specific scenes, but they did not interact much with the dancers.

It was during rehearsals for *Camará* and later *Serra Pelada* that Santos had an important insight. In *Camará*, Vieira invited *capoeiristas* from different parts of Brazil and their number in the company grew from two to five. Santos, who wanted to include them in another way in the piece, asked them to come take all the dance classes. At that time, dancers used to take the most diverse technique classes, such as classical ballet, capoeira, Afro-Brazilian dances, modern dance, Silvestre Technique, and others, while *capoeiristas* would only take classes in capoeira and Afro-Brazilian dance. When they started to take ballet classes with Carlos Moraes[75], the same ballet master who had taught Vieira and other *capoeiristas* in Salvador in the 1960s-1970s, and other dance techniques, Santos saw their potential and envisioned the way choreographies could bring dancers and *capoeiristas* together in the same scenes doing the same movements. As she describes:

[75] Carlos Moraes, classical ballet master from Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, who moved to Salvador and became one of the most important teachers in the process of dancers' formation and choreographies with different companies.

> I remember that they took classes with Jelon [Vieira] and black dance and I said, "No. they have to take classical ballet classes too." I talked to Carlinhos [Carlos Morais] and he loved the idea. I started to observe, and then I noticed that we do not need to have an imposed methodology or technique because when I saw the guys taking those classes…they executed [the movements] … they did not have the control of the [specifics of that] technique but their bodies responded. The leg stayed there [in a développé] and they did not know that technique but their bodies were prepared. I started to bring that to the creation.[76] (Santos)

Santos's perception of the *capoeiristas'* potential to dance reinforced an understanding of body training that questioned the hegemony of classical ballet technique. The belief in classical ballet as the most complete and unique technique that could prepare the movers to dance—a thought that permeated the dance field and dancers' mentality in Salvador—was questioned when Santos witnessed that the *capoeiristas*' movement control and ability to dance, which emerged from their background in capoeira. "The guys came from capoeira and they had prepared bodies [to dance]. I said, yes, capoeira and black dance …"[77] (Santos). In *Camará*, Santos encouraged Vieira to re-create a duet he danced a long time ago with the dancer Ivone Pires, *Capoeira do Amor*. In *Serra Pelada,* Santos choreographed a duet between a male dancer and a male *capoeirista*, a duet that had no direct relation to capoeira in which "nobody could distinguish who was the dancer and who was the *capoeirista*" (Santos). Both duets were remarkable in blurring the dancer/*capoeirista* division.

This entanglement of performers changed the company's aesthetic for the second time. Several factors helped this change lead the company toward what I call the "adult

[76] Originally in Portuguese. My translation from personal interview.
[77] Originally in Portuguese. My translation from personal interview.

phase" of Dance Brazil, a period in which a "dancing personality" and movement language flourished. The company had finally uncovered its signature movement style. After *Ginga*, the last choreography Santos created for Dance Brazil, she left the company, calling it a "wonderful experience" (Santos). *Ginga* did not reflect her success of the previous choreographies, as it turned out to be a compilation of Afro-Bahian dances without much involvement of historical background and socio-political engagement. Santos's pieces—*Quilombos*, *Camará*, *Serra Pelada*, and *Ginga* —still are remembered as great successes of the company. In addition, the challenge she brought to *capoeiristas* and the discovery of infinite possibilities of creation born from their inclusion in the company as "*capoeiristas* who can dance," shaped Dance Brazil's unique movement style and acclaim in the following years.

Throughout the years Santos worked with Dance Brazil, alongside her choreographic productions she was also able to begin developing her methodology known as "Dance of Black Expression" during her residencies in the U.S. and in classes she taught in Brazil. As the company worked in seasons that alternated tours through the U.S. with periods in which its members stayed in Salvador working with other groups and institutions,[78] Santos was able to teach at UFBA Dance School, securing her position as a permanent staff member and leading the projects she developed there and at FUNCEB, where she was contracted to teach from 1989 – 2003., and, after stop working as a choreographer with the Dance Brazil, Santos was invited by Vieira for residencies in U.S. universities such as the University of Florida (Gainesville, FL), University of

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Tennessee (Nashville, TN), University of Alabama at Birmingham (Birmingham, AL), University of Colorado Boulder (Boulder, CO). Despite her successful interventions in the history of Dance Brazil in the U.S. and connections, Santos did not demonstrate a desire to leave Brazil and move to the U.S.

Final Considerations

> *Not only is historiography valuable in recognizing and, in some cases, adding to canonical narratives of the past, it is valuable in imagining and enacting alternative modes of history making that might uncover hidden participants, sources, and social worlds*.
>
> - Lyndsay Rose Russel, Feminist Historiography –

By engaging with the testimonies of black women as the primary sources to write this narrative on the history of dance in Salvador and its expansion throughout the U.S., in this chapter I have highlighted the importance of Silvestre's and Santos' s contributions to the creation of alternative ways to develop and affirm their artistic identities within the African diaspora. By looking at their passage through the UFBA Dance School as students and members of Odundê, a dance-research group fundamental to the explorations of African-based content and black dancers' expression within academia, I demonstrate how oblique lines were created in that space. I have looked at Santos's projects that created an alternative route and opportunities for black women to reconnect within the hostile environment of the UFBA Dance School. Moreover, by examining dancers' migrations during the 1970s, driven by the hard conditions of living

under a dictatorship and their personal interest in professional growth, I shed light on the contributions made by Emilia Biancardi and Viva Bahia, and by Jelon Vieira and Dance Brazil to Silvestre's and Santos's entry into the transnational African diaspora route between Brazil and the U.S. Between 1977 and today, more than forty years, the only female dancer-choreographers who choreographed for Dance Brazil were Silvestre and Santos, a fact that both reinforces these choreographers' uniqueness and provides evidences of the privilege in terms of opportunities offered to men. Silvestre and Santos Silvestre's "butterfly" spirit and her transnational reach contributed to the creation of a network of relationships that facilitated exchanges and collaborations among dancer-choreographer-educators within the black dance diaspora; a diaspora that is still being formed. In this sense, as Russel affirms in the epigraph above, historiography allowed me to look at imagined and enacted "alternative modes of history making" that uncovers hidden participants, sources, and social worlds" (171). Although I do not develop a historiographical research in this dissertation, the closeness to Silvestre and Santos, and to the Brazilian and Bahian dance community—and most of the artists mentioned here—as well as my experience within the UFBA Dance School and my work with Dance Brazil were key to my analysis of Silvestre's and Santos's interventions upon the history of dance in Brazil and beyond. This look at the history facilitated my understanding of these artists' methodologies and choreographic creations, which I will explore in the following chapters.

Chapter 3: *Terreiro*[79] Corporealities and Dance Methodologies: Suggesting Alternative Movement Grammar/Language

PROLOGUE

> *You have the four elements that generate a language. But it is a subjective language, different from a fifth position in classical ballet. Earth, water, air, and fire […] that is why it is so important to ally the Symbology of the Orixás dance class [to Silvestre Technique].*
>
> -Rosangela Silvestre, Interview - [80]

Black feminist scholars in the Americas have been imperative to the process of identifying singular characteristics in black women's writing and practices. These particular characteristics are understood by Hortense Spillers, Darlene J. Sadlier, and Luiza Bairros, for example, as strategies of resistance. In "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," Spillers observes how black women have used the interstices in Anglo-Saxon academic writing as a space to express their thoughts in their own ways. As Spillers asserts, "The missing word – the interstice – both as that which allows us to speak about and that which enables us to speak at all – share, in this case, a common border with another country of symbols – the iconographic" (77). Similarly, in *Pós-colonialismo, feminismo e a escrita de mulheres de cor nos Estados Unidos,* Sadlier highlights autobiographic texts as a characteristic embraced by U.S. black women scholars who aimed to create a language through which they could communicate and speak to a black

[79] "The sacred temple where the whorship of Orixás and eguns are practiced; the term designates, at the same time, the place, the geographic site, the sanctuary, and the community related to this." (Lepine 77) Original: "O templo onde é praticado o culto dos Orixás ou dos eguns; o termo designa, ao mesmo tempo, o lugar, o sítio geográfico, o santuário, e a comunidade ligada a este ultimo."

[80]. "Você tem os quarto elementos que gera uma linguagem. Mas são linguagens subjetivas, diferente da quinta posição de bale. Terra, água, ar, e fogo, […] Por isso a importância de aliar a aula de Symbologia de Orixás [`a Técnica Silvestre]." (Silvestre; my translation)

female audience; this required a shift in the way other authors—white men, white women, and black men—wrote in and outside of academia. As the author observes, it was the lived experience of black women that facilitated the creation of a sort of identification or connection among them. Women's lived experiences also provided vocabulary and visual references that other women could recognize and be touched by in the texts. In Brazil, for instance, Bairros perceives Lélia Gonzalez's use of a "*pretoguês*" (4) as the creation of a language that facilitated her communication with black people within the African diaspora.

These feminists' interpretations of black female authors' own ways of writing as the creation of alternative languages that become strategies of resistance can be extended to the corporeal dimension. In this case, movement becomes the primary element of expression and communication within a community, even with cultural influences that add multiple possibilities for interpretation. The subjectivity Rosangela Silvestre mentions in the quotation above allows broad access and communication through moving bodies which engender nonverbal vocabularies. In this chapter, I introduce Técnica Silvestre or Silvestre Technique and Edileusa Santos's Dança de Expressão Negra (Dance of Black Expression) as corporeal languages/grammars built upon Yoruba cosmology and Afro-Brazilian Candomblé. I argue that by engaging primarily with a holistic epistemology instead of white, male-dominated Western structures of knowledge that separate knowing into discrete categories, Silvestre and Santos create alternative axes and spaces for movers' dance-making, and in doing so, encourage them to re-establish connections with memories, identities, and human, supra-human, and non-human

elements in the world. The work of both dancer-choreographer-educators is based on their lived experiences and particularly inspired by elements observed within Candomblé houses or *terreiros*.

I identify three main aspects of *terreiros* corporealities that are unfolded and explored in different ways by Silvestre and Santos. By describing corporeality as a "treatment offered to the body as a set of symbolic elements structured with a determined intent" (Martins 81), I suggest that Candomblé practitioners' physicality transits and transforms between three different states of corporeal reality or bodily behavior: 1) the daily practices outside the *terreiro*; 2) daily rituals within the *terreiro*; and 3) performance under the Orixás or divine guidance. The questions I raise here are related to the potential training processes and/or the physical preparation that I suggest is concomitant to the spiritual work within this territory. Transitional physicality, close compositional collaboration between body and drums, dance and music, dancers and drummers, and symbolic communication are the main aspects I identify in the *terreiros* and find unfolded in Silvestre and Santos's work.

In Silvestre Technique, Silvestre re-imagines a *corpo universo*, or "body universe," composed of three triangles crossed by the four elements of nature (earth, water, air, and fire), the vibrations of the Orixás associated with each of the four elements of nature, and Indian chakras. In Part I of this chapter, I engage in a detailed analysis of Silvestre's technical proposal discussing her use of a term "universe/universal," often employed to impose culturally dominant values, and observing how several premises of her pedagogy are aligned with black feminisms. Silvestre is currently in a moment in

which her attention is primarily focused on the technique and the multiple directions it is taking throughout the world. Consequently, my participant observation of Silvestre's work during my ethnography in Salvador and during our encounter in the workshops she taught in Austin allowed me to dive into her methodology in a way I could not do with Santos's methodology because Santos was concentrated in her choreographic creation instead of in her teaching at that moment. This difference is reflected in my dissertation, in which Part I of this chapter, focusing on Silvestre's work, is longer than Part II, which is dedicated to Santos's methodology.

Santos's Dance of Black Expression proposes a new perspective on what she calls a "new body/drum identity" (Santos E. 53) or the *corpo/tambor* and *tambor/corpo* (*body/drum* and *drum/body*). By decentering the perception of the black dancing body (Gottschild "The Black Dancing Body") in African-derived dance as the protagonist to look at the relationship of black dancing body and drummer-drums as foundational in this dancing, Santos points to other possibilities of understanding African-rooted concert dance. She suggests that this foundational relationship allows the creation of a link between an individual and her/his ancestral memories, encourages a perception of the drumming-dancing through the five senses, and facilitates explorations of the body's polyrhythm and polycentrism through the association of body parts and the Orixás. Santos's use of improvisation in her methodology which propels the dancers' search toward a discovery of their own movement language is characterized as a liberating practice I relate to the insights of black feminists and black queer scholars.

One important characteristic observed in both methodologies is the encouragement of a physical-spiritual-political presence in the studio. In this regard, although Silvestre's and Santos's methodologies incorporate and address physical skills, they are primarily concerned with what these skills allow dancers to express, assigning value to who they are, their characteristics and ways of moving informed by their memories and cultural influences. I read Silvestre's and Santos's proposals as empowering art, in alignment with black feminist theories and practices, since they activate "epistemologies that [can serve to] criticize prevailing knowledge and that enable us to define our own realities *on our own terms*"[81] (Collins 292).

TERREIRO CORPOREALITIES: INSPIRING CONCERT DANCE AND THE CREATION OF ALTERNATIVE GRAMMAR/LANGUAGES

Among the most impressive memories I have from my visits to a Candomblé *terreiro* before I became a practitioner is the enduring image of a young, thin, agile man moving—in stark contrast to his physique—slowly, with his back hunched, walking with difficulty, his muscles trembling like an old person's. The man's moving body—which at the beginning of the ceremony (the Xirê[82]) moved easily across the space with precision

81. The use of the Italics is like it is in the original text.

82. "According to the dictionary *Yoruba Language*, one of the acceptations of *Xirê* is that it is a game, a playful moment, joy. In Brazil, the *Xirê* is the general designation used to name the sequence of ritualistic dances in Candomblé which starts with Exu and ends with Oxalá. A pre-established order is followed as in a theatrical script, bringing together similar Orixás: Orixás related to the water, the earth, hunting, to the world's creation in a functional order that corresponds to meanings prescribed by the Yoruba model" (my translation). Original text: "Segundo o dicionário Yoruba Language, uma das acepções de xirê é jogo, momento lúdico, divertimento. No Brasil, o xirê é a designação geral usada para nominar a sequência de danças rituais dos candomblés, que começa com Exu e é finalizada com Oxalá. Segue-se uma ordem pre-estabelecida, como se fosse um roteiro teatral, reunindo orixás afins: das águas, da terra, da caça, da criacão do mundo, numa ordem funcional e que atende aos significados prescritos pelo modelo yorubá" (Sabino and Lody 103).

in its gestures, transferring its weight with quick muscular responses and lightness—did not seem like the same body I observed later when the man was dancing under the guidance or possession of the Orixá Oxalá. Oxalá is known as the oldest Orixá, the father of all other Orixás, and his presence physically demonstrates such wisdom and aged experience. Thus, the young man's performance differed considerably from that of Oxalá. In observing the contrast of the young, light physicality of the practitioner embodying the energy of Oxalá and moving as an aged man, I began to reflect on the interconnectedness and interdependence between the spiritual and the physical in African-derived religions in terms of the processes of corporeal training necessary to enable bodily transformation.

The ability to perform completely discrete movements in terms of intensity, cadence, muscular energy exerted, trajectory traversed in space, and other elements that are combined and engaged with in a dance to create nuanced movement can be observed in Candomblé's practitioners. Both members who are able to embody or be possessed by the Orixá and members who have never undergone initiation or possession transition between a gestural repertoire used in their everyday life outside the *terreiro* and a gestural repertoire used inside the *terreiro*. I refer to these physical transformations here as a "transitional physicality." Through an *Iaô*[83]'s dance performance under the manifestation of an Orixá, for example, it is possible to see a body moving with the flow of water and imagine this water running in a river or undulating in the ocean. The "quotidian body" can transition from fast, fragmented, high-intensity movements

[83] "In Candomblé, is the first level in the initiatory hierarchy. It could be an abbreviate form of iyá wòrisà, the most recent initiated from this house" (Lépine 73).

performed in daily rituals to fluid, measured movements during the religious manifestation of Iyemonjá or Oxum. The *Iaô*'s body thus transitions from typical everyday movements to undulations and expressions characteristic of moving water.

Although every Orixá's manifestation involves modifications to the way each specific body performs human and divine movements, the example of the differences I observed in the performances by the man, who is also an *Iaô,* and Oxalá within the *terreiro* is worth noting for the contrast in movement expressions. In *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahia Candomblé,* Yvonne Daniel also uses the contrasting example of a fourteen-year-old girl who experienced her first transformation in a Cuban Yoruba house. The author witnesses the "vacillations between a frightened, humble, young girl and an audacious and fiery dancing *Oricha*" (62). The characteristics Daniel describes contrast not only in terms of movement and muscular engagement, but also in terms of attitude. Daniel's and my own observations of spiritual manifestations through physical bodies in Cuban Yoruba and Bahian Candomblé led me to raise the following questions: How can the same material/expressive body transition between such different attitudes, postures, movement speeds, and degrees of strength, intensity, and mobility, among other factors that create movement nuances with such precision in its performance? What is the history of movement experienced by that *Iaô*'s body inside and outside the *terreiro* in order to allow that contrasting transformation? How has that body been prepared for that transformation/transition in terms of physicality?

As a trained dancer, my curiosity comes from the awareness of how much training, repetition, and time is necessary for a body to perform those movement nuances with precision. When considering that *terreiro* members' daily experiences vary considerably in terms of the type of physical engagement they have in their routines outside the *terreiro*, this curiosity becomes even greater. A lawyer, a cook, an engineer, a historian, a musician, and a dancer, for instance, are involved in activities that require different levels of corporeal engagement. This observation leads me to suggest that the embodiment of the Orixás' ways of presenting themselves, by imprinting the features of natural elements onto the moving body, is only possible due to the preparation that every practitioner undergoes before and during initiation in their everyday rituals of the *terreiro*. In other words, I argue that alongside and within the process of spiritual initiation and the intervention of the spiritual force on the practitioner's physicality, there is also a process of training the material body. In advocating for this potential training observed within the Candomblé rituals and the space of the *terreiro*, I reinforce Silvestre's perception of a body-training process during initiation. As Silvestre declares in an interview with Barbara Browning:

> In *Candomblé*, initiates go through an elaborate process of training—not merely learning the choreographies of the *orixás* but learning the mythology, the songs, even washing the garments and preparing the food necessary for the ceremonies—and all these processes of training prepare the body to "let itself be carried away"—se deixar levar. (172)

In highlighting storytelling and the learning of not-literally danced activities as part of the practitioner's preparation for the spiritual/physical transformation, or for what she describes as a process of "let[ting] itself be carried away—se deixar levar," Silvestre adds

even more complexity to the concept of transitional physicality I propose here. In Silvestre's view, the training of the body to dance before and under the guidance of an Orixá, or to actually transition between movement dynamics, goes beyond the exploration of physical abilities; it also involves the development of a knowledge around the stories behind the movements, entities, and activities that co-exist with the dancing body during the ritualistic performance within the *terreiro*.

Nevertheless, the transitional physicality and training process are neither limited to *voduncis*, the ones who are able to perform under the guidance of an Orixá, nor to the experience of initiation. While in the above quote Silvestre illuminates the complexity of training for Candomblé initiates, I, as an *abiã*[84] who did not yet have access to the initiation rituals, observe how this complexity and training that facilitates material transitions can also be observed outside the process of initiation or by non-initiates. I argue that *terreiro* corporealities are not only "built from the spiritual union that results from the primordial intervention of the divinity" (Martins 81), or when the Orixá or *Caboclo* manifests in the body of an *Iaô*. These corporealities are also formed by quotidian or daily rituals, fundamental to the diverse bodies that arrive in that space. By "diverse bodies" I mean bodies with a multiplicity of outside experiences and previous corporeal abilities. These bodies perform greetings, prayers, cooking, sweeping, and other gestures involved in the daily life of a Candomblé community. It is from the combination of dancing by divine entities and the practitioner's (not-divine) gestures and

84. "Abiã – aspiring person, person who will born (bi = born) the one who passed through only the first rituals of worship integration, which means, the wash of the neckless" (Lépine 67).

movement performances that this particular corporeality and aspects of this bodily experience emerge.

In emphasizing the two ways in which bodily behaviors are observed within the specific territory, symbolic system, and cultural environment of a *terreiro*, this bodily reality appears as a "tangible and substantial category of [that] cultural experience" (Foster xi). As one example of quotidian behaviors in the *terreiro*, I emphasize the simple greeting exchange in which the younger practitioner curves the torso forward with hands cupped together, palms facing upward, while the older practitioner keeps his or her body higher, making an almost imperceptible inclination of the torso and pronouncing the specific words that are blessings. The whole body is involved in this simple gesture of greeting that is repeated several times throughout the day while one is present in that space. Repetition creates habit and embodiment in that body; a body fully immersed in that reality.

Another example of practitioners' quotidian gestures that represent these corporealities' aspect is the greeting-blessing of the *Iyalorixá* (priestess) or *Babalorixá* (priest),[85] and other practitioners who occupy positions in the *terreiro* hierarchy that require it.[86] In this act, *Iaôs* and *Abiãs* engage in the movements of *iká,* for the guidance of masculine Orixás, or *adobale,* for feminine Orixás' guidance (Sabino and Lody 110).[87] In both cases, *Iaôs* and *Abiãs* touch their heads on the floor/earth to show reverence and

85. "Iyalorixá – the mother of the Orixá, the mother of the saints" and "Babalorixá – the father of the saints" (Lépine 72, 69).

86. In the Ilê Omiojuarô, for instance, the Iyalaxé, Iyakekerê, and Iyaegbé may receive the same greeting-blessing the Iyalorixá and Babálorixá receive.

87. "Orixás masculinos – *oborós* – e orixás femininos – *iabás* -, que são identificados pelo *iká* e pelo *adobale*." (Sabino and Lody 110).

respect to the oldest practitioners in the space. They engage with specific movement variations, according to the Orixá who guides each *Ori*—feminine or masculine, as I mentioned before—and their starting point is always a "bundled" position. In the *iká*, the practitioner touches his or her forehead to the floor/earth, then "projects the whole body forward to be in touch with the floor" (Sabino and Lody 110), lying face-down. Then, the practitioner moves the hips backward to sit on the heels, moves the torso forward again to touch the floor with his/her forehead, and lastly, kisses the right hand of the *Iyálorixá* or *Babálorixá*. As Jorge Sabino and Raul Lody describe, it can also be followed by a *paô*.[88] In the case of the *adobale*, the practitioner touches the forehead, one hip, and then the other hip to the floor, before giving a kiss on the right hand of the *Iyálorixá* or *Babálorixá*. In both cases, while the *Iaô* or *Abiã* is lying prone on the floor, the *Iyá* or *Babá* touches her/his shoulders with a blessing gesture. This act of greeting-blessing has minor variations from *terreiro* to *terreiro* and, when performed during ceremonies, can be performed by practitioners and also by the practitioner-divinity union (the union with the Orixá*)*.

The movement variations described above are generally not practiced outside the *terreiro* and configure a specific bodily vocabulary and cultural experience. The repetition of these gestures and other actions, such as cooking, cleaning, or shelling beans in particular ways, prepare the bodies to dance during the rituals. In accordance with Silvestre, I acknowledge the training potential of quotidian gestures and actions in the

[88]"The paô is a rhythmic sequence of claps soundly acknowledged as a protocol attitude important in the relations between body and space" (Sabino and Lody 108).

terreiro as one aspect that contributes to the transitional physicality. In other words, I believe that the practitioners' ability and availability to transition from a quotidian physicality to a *terreiro* quotidian body to the Orixás' dancing physicality become possible not only through the process of spiritual initiation but also through the bodily training acquired through the daily activities within the community.

Inspired by this *terreiro* corporeality and the aspect of the practitioners' transitional physicality, Silvestre and Santos offer different strategies for dancers to read and access movement nuances. Silvestre engages with the four elements of nature—earth, water, air, and fire—and the features of the Orixás linked to each one of these elements—Exu, Ogum, Oxossi, Omolu, Ossãe (earth); Iyemonjá, Oxum, Nanã, Oxalá (water); Iansã (air); Xangô (fire) as they are imagined located in specific areas of the body. Santos, on the other hand, uses the different rhythms of the drums and specific features of the Orixás' dances and their archetypes as guides to move different parts of the body simultaneously, characterizing a kind of polydynamism. Both Silvestre and Santos focus on the energy or vibration present in each natural element, drum rhythm, and Orixá, encouraging dancers to move in ways that are inspired or prescribed by these aspects and to either maintain that vibration and characteristic in a movement sequence or alternate between these vibrations as desired. Instead of relying on more familiar terms used to describe movement dynamics such as strong, light, heavy, accelerated, direct, indirect, or slow, in different ways and using different methods Silvestre and Santos engage with Orixá-inspired languages, providing an alternative language/grammar to primarily

European methods for the creation and performance of movement nuances and movement analysis.

Another important aspect observed in *terreiro* corporealities is the dialogic relationship between body and drums, movements and rhythms, divinities/Orixás and drummers/*ogãs alabês*[89]. Drums receive special treatment in the *terreiros*, including the process of sacralization. As Sabino and Lody assert, "the *atabaque* will not be only a musical instrument; it will occupy the role of a divinity and that is why it will be sacralized, fed, dressed; it will receive its own name and only priests and important people within the community will touch and play them during the rituals" (95).[90] The authors' words illuminate the fact that drums are not there only to support the ceremonies and the danced performance of divinities, or as complementary and impersonal presences. They are as important and fundamental as the human-divinity bodies and need to undergo preparation to become an active part in the sacred rituals. "The drums speak," reproducing the tunes and modulations of the Yoruba language—high, medium, and grave—which implicates the necessity of three different drums to indeed create the nuances of the rhythms (Lépine 31-32). The *rum*, *rumpi*, and *runlé* or *lé* drums have their specific functions and sounds but together create a unique orchestra. These three are also read as a unique body in which "*rum* is the head, *rump*i is the body, and *lé* is the legs" (Sabino and Lody 99). While the *rumpi* and *lé* maintain the basis for movement and the

[89]In the *ketu-nagô* tradition, the drummers are called o*gans alabês*; they are also known as *runtós* in the Jeje (Fon) traditions and *xicanrigomes* in the Angola-Congo (Bantu) tradition. (Sabino and Lody 98).
[90]"O atabaque não será apenas um instrumento musical; ele ocupará o papel de uma divindade e, por isso, será sacralizado, alimentado, vestido; possuirá nome próprio e apenas sacerdotes e pessoas de importância para a comunidade poderão tocá-lo e usá-lo nos rituais" (Sabino and Lody 95).

bodily storytelling, the *rum* calls and accentuates the specific movements and transitions in the dance-prayer. It is the *rum* that relates directly to the "improvised" choreography while in conversation with the Orixá through the practitioner-divinity's moving body.

This dialogic aspect permeates the relationships within the Candomblé community: between practitioners and drummers, a relationship that involves respect and attention to each other, especially during quotidian rituals and the *Xirê*; among drummers, so that they may be synchronized with each other while playing the specific and multiple *toques*, or different variations and rhythms, played for each specific Orixá; between drummers and drums, a close relationship that involves ways of touching and implementing variations in the way the bodies produce the sounds or voices; between drummer and Orixá, a relationship that involves lots of respect and subtle communication, and a relationship that requires extra attention paid by the drummer to the symbols and indications that the Orixá may send to him; and lastly, between drums and Orixás, a divinity-divinity relationship that is intermediated by the human bodies of practitioners (*vodunci* and *ogã alabê*). As *Alabê* Alfredinho says, "The toques are the means of communication. It is as if the *atabaques* were talking to the Orixás" (Alfredinho in Martins 98). The communication also occurs through the lyrics sung in archaic Yoruba and which actually narrate the stories the Orixás tell through dancing. All these factors characterize an environment of interdependency and collaboration among the elements that are part of this community.

Silvestre and Santos offer differences in the way they propose the establishment of a relationship between dance and music in their work. Silvestre explores the idea of

complementarity and partnership by suggesting that the sound fills the empty spaces created by the body in motion. When she starts the initial conversation,[91] she encourages students to think about the space that appears when angles are created by the flexion of the elbows. Music is often playing in the background. During this time, the dancers' knees are bent and their hands slide upward along the outside of the thighs. There is no empty space, but rather, a space that is filled by the sounds. Suddenly, the knees straighten and the hands slide down the thighs, binding the arms to the torso again. The sound is abruptly paused or the harmonic instrument produces a staccato note. The opposite also happens; when movement stops, the music plays, and vice versa. As Silvestre's musician describes it, "what they donate to us, we donate to them as well in the form of musical notes" (Luciano in "Batemos um papo").[92] In Silvestre Technique, we observe the opened conversations described by this musician as a response in the same measure. What I experienced, when taking classes at the intensive program in Salvador 2016, is a creation of a sort of "sound bed" that allows the communication and resonances of movement in the music and vice-versa, but in which there is not necessarily a specific rhythm that follows the movements constantly during the danced conversations. It is never an expected dialogue, there is plenty of room for surprises on both sides, and these surprises provoke responses. A "jazz-like" relationship is created. By considering the comment made by one of the Silvestre training program participants

[91]Silvestre calls the sequences of movement she teaches in Silvestre Technique classes conversations. I identify the class structure as compound by three moments; a moment of concentration, initial conversations, and complex dialogues, as I will explain later in this chapter.

[92]Provided bibliographic reference is under the website https://www.facebook.com/soteropolistve/videos/batemos-um-papo-com-a-bailarina-rosangela-silvestre-vem-com-o-soter%C3%B3polisarte-cu/1487255238030097/

who perceives Silvestre Technique as a "jazz form for the body" (Jones L.), I affirm that it is a jazz form for the body-sound that dancers and musicians are composing together. This quality of Silvestre Technique is probably the result of her own experience as a dancer-composer in Coleman's jazz band. In that space, Silvestre's dance serves as an additional instrument in the band (Browning 174).

In her classes on the Symbology of the Orixás, Silvestre also encourages improvisation and leaves space for individuality within a previously created and pre-established vocabulary and symbology. If in religious rituals the *rum* calls the Orixá and indicates the changes in the choreography, as I mentioned earlier, in the dance studio the movements call the transitions in the music or serve as the primary reference for the drummer, who is creating the accents and following the choreography closely. In this case, the presence of the other instruments is important for creating a metric or rhythmic basis so that the dancers have a place to return when they experience variations in movement and time. Silvestre encourages dancers to understand through their own body and, for example, the relationship to Oxossi's vibrations, the time to execute the movement of taking an arrow from an imaginary quiver on their back, placing it in the bow, drawing the bow back, and firing the arrow in the direction of the one's imaginary target. There is a sequence of movements that touches on traditional steps, but they are combined with moments in which the dancer is free to re-corporealize the symbols in a way that their bodies are prepared to do them. As Silvestre asserts, the symbology or tradition is not fixed, and in the dance studio, there is an artistic connotation that allows this respectful freedom. The drum accentuates the gestures and is also inspired by them.

Santos, on the other hand, proposes a new perspective on the relationship between dancers, drums, and drummers. By affirming that "the drums/drummers are not a boombox that you can turn on and off when you want" (Santos in *Entrevista*), Santos calls attention to the importance of the relationship that is created in the present moment of dancing, not only with the rhythm but with the drummers. Santos's Dance of Black Expression is experimental, and the dialogue or call-response relationship between dancer and drummers and movement and sounds is the main focus of the danced experience. As Santos asserts, "During the process of investigation and creation a new perspective on the drum emerges; in seeking new possibilities of dialogues the relationship with the instrument, with the body/drum, becomes clear."[93] These new possibilities of dialogue are explored through the relationship of dancers with at least two instruments, the minimum number to create a base and variations. As Santos describes, in Candomblé, the Orixá's dances are characterized by the maintenance of a rhythmic base through the legs, while the variations on movement symbols that tell the stories are performed by the upper part of the body. Each drum focuses on a part of the body. In her class, it is important to have these possibilities. She encourages dancers to investigate how different parts of the body respond simultaneously to the variations of more than one drum. If the right leg is responding to the *rumpi,* the left shoulder can respond to the *rum*. As in Silvestre Technique, there is a mutual composition; body and drums create the

[93] "No processo de investigação e criação revela-se um novo olhar sobre o tambor; ao se buscarem novas possibilidades de diálogo, fica evidenciada a relação com o instrumento, com o corpo Tambor" (Santos 53).

choreography-song together. As it is important to notice, Santos and Silvestre allow for an emergent relationship between music and dance for improvisation.

Terreiro corporeality is anchored in the symbolic communication. As Sodré asserts, "the *terreiro* worships the *arche*, the tradition, ergo the symbolic knowledge" ("A Verdade Seduzida" 158). Sodré provides a significant analysis of the symbolic in relation to the signal or semantic rationalism. According to the author, while the signal reduces the world through interpretation to univocal codes of signification, the symbol allows a "continuing shifting of the meaning in a territory"[94] (158). In Sodré's words, "More than a plethora of meanings, the orixá (god), the foundation of black traditional knowledge, is a symbol, ergo, force" (158).[95] The Orixás' dances and songs are opened to multiple ways of perception. They are not trying to be understood and interpreted in a singular way by everyone. The process of symbol transformation in signals or in a language to be able to explain things and clarify them is a Western tendency. Sodré explains:

> Indeed, in the face of any fact, any phenomenon, the universalist approach of the West tends to finalize it in a singular way: the question of signification. […] It is necessary to transform, at all costs, the fact into an idea, a description, an interpretation, in sum, [it is necessary to] *find another name for it besides its own* [author's emphasis]. Even the non-signification is forced to pass through the idea of making sense. […] This necessity of interpreting to make it signify is one of the great Western civilizing force lines. ("A Verdade Seduzida" 8)[96]

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[94] "pelo deslizamento contínuo do sentido num território (a indeterminação absoluta dos entes)" (Sodré 158).

[95]. "Mais do que uma pletora de significados, o orixá (deus), base do saber tradicional do negro, é símbolo, logo, força" (158).

[96]"Realmente, diante de qualquer fato, qualquer fenômeno, a abordagem universalista do Ocidente tende a ultimar-se de um único modo: a pergunta sobre a significação. [...] É preciso transformar a qualquer preço o fato em ideia, em descrição, em interpretação, em suma, achar-lhe um *outro nome além do seu.* Até mesmo a não-significação obriga-se a passar pelo sentido [...] Essa necessidade de interpretar, para fazer significar, é uma das grandes linhas de forca da civilização ocidental" (Sodré 8).

The author supplements his explanation by using the example of the colonization process. He says:

> The code, a system of rationalist functionality, semanticizes [semantic], semiotizes [semiotics]. In other words, it frames the world in a unidimensional mode, making—in the process of symbolizing—a thing or a sign represent only the function determined by the capitalist order of exchange. It is not for nothing that Jacques Berque defined European colonization as a "semantic" fact, in other words, as a power of a "linguistic" (and not symbolic) vision of the world. (Sodré "A verdade Seduzida" 10)[97]

Through these observations Sodré reveals the character of resistance implicated in the practices within the *terreiros*. Although these spaces were formed by the same people who follow another order in the colonized city of Salvador, within the *terreiros* they are guided by a different orientation.

The subjectivity of dance naturally allows multiple perceptions, albeit few contemporary scholars have begun to use semiotics as a way to read dance in Brazil.[98] Silvestre and Santos use the lens of the *terreiro*'s symbolic orientation in their classrooms. Both artists engage with the gestures and movements involved in the Orixás' dances as symbols that can be perceived differently and which open up space for multiple understandings and even re-creations of these symbols. Santos encourages students to capture the energy of each rhythm and to respond with different parts of the body, inspired by the energy of the Orixá imagined in that part of the body. A subjective verbal

[97]O código, sistema de funcionalidade racionalista, semantiza, semiotiza. Em outras palavras, enquadra unidimensionalmente o mundo, providenciando para que, no processo de simbolização, uma coisa ou um signo representem apenas a função estipulada pelo ordenamento do valor de troca capitalista. Não é à toa que já se definiu (Jacques Berque) o fenômeno da colonização europeia como um fato "semântico", isto é, como o poder de uma visão "linguística" (e não simbólica) do mundo" (Sodré 10).

[98] The 2000s had been marked by a trend of few Brazilian dance scholars to engage with

language inspires a subjective bodily response to it. Similarly, Silvestre, who uses particular symbols, leaves space for the unfolding of those symbols and stories, instead of trying to define and clarify the myths in detail. The oral culture—which is the way that myths are told in the *terreiros* alongside dance and music—allows people to tell the same story in different ways, as well as to perceive them differently.

Part I

Dança de Memória e *Corpo Universo.*: Silvestre Technique and Symbology of the Orixás, Embracing Memory and Re-imagining Body

On August 1, 2016, my first day of class at the Silvestre Intensive program and re-encounter with Silvestre after my ethnographic journey began, she made clear one of the primary guides of her pedagogical approach: the symbology of the Orixás and the cosmology of Candomblé. It was during an informal conversation before the start of class that Silvestre casually referred to Oxossi's *Ofá* (bow and arrow) as a metaphor for her trajectory in dance and the development of a dance technique. As Silvestre said, by looking at the *Ofá* and the movement it suggests, it is possible to notice that the further one pulls the string backward, the further the arrow flies. In other words, the further the arrow is drawn back, the greater its capacity to reach an even farther destination. The arrow's movement in this tale is precise and perfect in terms of the trajectory it follows through space. Oxossi is the Orixá known as the hunter and provider of food for his community. He is the one who holds the knowledge to penetrate the forest, disguise himself through camouflage, and capture his hunted prey using the *Ofá* with great skill

(Sabino and Lody 133). One of the most popular myths of Oxossi tells the story of how he was challenged to kill a giant bird, achieving this feat using only one arrow.[99] Silvestre's metaphor focuses exactly on the arrow's movement; a movement of return that generates a bigger or smaller movement forward. In observing this necessary movement of return in Oxossi's *Ofá* in her own life path, Silvestre interprets this backwards motion as a reconnection with past facts and memories, arguing that this link provides her the necessary structure to advance in her life and artistic career.

The incorporation of gestures and principles to which Silvestre was exposed in her childhood and adolescence is part of a process of reconnecting with a body of knowledge that Silvestre was led to cast aside when she started her formal studies in dance. As she describes, she was raised by her great-grandparents, who were *Caboclos*,[100] and her grandmother, a black woman. Her illiterate grandmother envisioned a future with more opportunities for Silvestre by providing a formal education that included dance studies; for her, education was a potential door to Silvestre's freedom in terms of making choices and developing a professional career. Silvestre's great-grandparents had unique cultural habits that included dancing and singing during their daily activities of fishing, cooking, washing clothes in the river, and shucking corn, among others. These practices left their mark on Silvestre not only mentally and affectively, but also corporeally. Moreover, Silvestre's mother, an *Iyalorixá* in Candomblé, introduced and gave her access

[99] The myth can be found at Verger (26).

[100] As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the term "Caboclo" is used to refer to a person with Indigenous Brazilian and European ancestry. Caboclos were known have a rustic lifestyle, with minimal socialization skills (Look for a source). Silvestre's great-grandparents were not the Caboclo entities referred to in Chapter 1 and observed in certain Candomblé *terreiros*; rather they belonged to a generation in which the Caboclos were a commonly recognized ethnic group.

to the rituals and ceremonies within the *terreiro*, which deeply inspired Silvestre. Nevertheless, this trajectory was interrupted when she began her formal studies. As she describes:

> These processes of being with my great-grandparents and attending the [Candomblé] ceremonies, for me, were my first educators in dance because later, there was a break. When I went to study dance at my elementary, middle, and high schools, and even at college, there were not many links to these memories. When I said 'Ok, now I will study dance,' my first contact was with classical ballet because there were no dances from memories for us to practice. What we had were modern dances, classical ballet, gymnastics, etc. […] So, my path in dance was initially one of observing, absorbing, and soon after, discarding a memory.[101] (Silvestre)

In understanding her life within a family where dancing and singing were part of their everyday activities, one in which "bodies used to gesticulate and act with many messages" (Silvestre) as a process of "observing and absorbing" an ancestral knowledge that became fundamental in her professional dance-making and allowed for the development of artistic identity and individuality in her work, Silvestre calls attention to the fact that formal educational institutions operate in the opposite direction. Through her experience she perceived that European and Euro-American-centered dance institutions' pedagogies and methodologies rely on one's detachment from and denial of cultural identity and corporeality. By considering the strong African influence and the rich cultural productions observed in Salvador, Bahia, the contrast between art educational

[101] "Esses processos de estar com meus bisavós e de ir para essas cerimônias [de Candomblé], pra mim, eles foram meus primeiros educadores pra dança porque o processo depois teve um corte. Porque quando eu fui estudar no ginásio, no primário e até mesmo na faculdade, a ligação com essas memórias não tinha muito. Quando eu fui entrar e dizer assim 'ok, agora vou fazer dança' meu primeiro contato foi com o balé clássico porque não tinham essas danças de memoria pra gente praticar. O que tinham eram danças modernas, balé, ginástica […] Então o meu caminho com dança foi primeiro de observar, absorver, e descartar, logo depois, uma memória" (Silvestre; my translation).

institutions and the environment where they are immersed becomes shocking, especially for those who are raised surrounded by Afro-Brazilian traditions and cultural references. In fact, I would supplement Silvestre's comment on her trajectory by adding the subsequent process of reconnection with her memories, this ancestral knowledge, and cultural information. This reconnection is part of what Silvestre has experienced in the last twenty to thirty years choreographing and developing her dance technique. I would say that the process of "observing, absorbing, and, soon after, discarding a memory" was followed by a re-approximation to and embracing of her memories in her artistic life.

In this regard, the few choreographer-educators with whom Silvestre had contact when she started to penetrate the professional scene in Salvador, Bahia, and who worked to bridge dance studies and research with African-derived traditions were imperative for Silvestre's understanding of other possibilities in dance-making. Mercedes Baptista,[102] Emilia Biancardi,[103] Clyde Morgan,[104] and, in particular, Mestre King,[105] and Conceição Castro,[106] are examples of people who inspired her toward a reconnection with her informally embodied knowledge. Mestre King —known for his research of and work in Afro-Bahian modern dance —was the first person who gave her the opportunity to perform on stage. Mestre King showed her how the dances of the Orixás could be

[102] Black woman dancer-choreographer pioneer in the studies of a black modern dance in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil between the 1940s and 1980s.
[103] Ethnomusicologist who directed one of the first folkloric dance groups in Bahia during the 1960s – Viva Bahia Ensemble.
[104] U.S. black male dancer-choreographer, Brazilianist who came to teach at the Dance School of the Federal University of Bahia between the 1960s and 1970s.
[105] Black male dancer-choreographer pioneer in the development/research about a Afro-Bahian modern dance.
[106] Dance professor at the Federal University of Bahia during the 1o70s and 1980s. Director of the Odundê, a University's group of research on Afro-Brazilian dances and music.

approached in the dance studio. According to Silvestre, through her work with Mestre King she understood that the movements of the Orixás could provide elements for dance studies. This experience also transformed her view of what she observed within the *terreiros*. Another important experience that inspired Silvestre was performing with the group Odundê under the mentorship of Conceição Castro. It was during her work with Odundê that Silvestre learned much about dance research, ethnography, and collective creation as strategies for choreographic development. In addition, by looking at the creation of an Afro-Brazilian identity in their choreographies, Odundê served to reveal how the overlapping of Europeanist[107] and Africanist[108] aesthetics could generate new configurations of a contemporary Brazilian dance that valued and acknowledged the contributions of African heritage. Silvestre was not only a performer but also a dance teacher in this group, which helped her to identify her interest in and vocation for pedagogical practices.

Despite Silvestre's early beginnings as a teacher, the differential in her teaching was built from her continuing critical thinking about her practices and self-reflection. As Silvestre says:

> When I began to teach, my class was divided into two different phases: first, I used to start at the barre, teaching classical ballet movements and second, I used to lead [students] toward sequences of movements with displacement along a diagonal, exploring movements borrowed from dances of the Orixás. Then, there was a moment in which I realized that I could create a structure of bodily training without using classical ballet movements as they were. Rather, I could engage

[107] "[it] is used to denote concepts and practices in Europe and the Americas that have their tap roots in concepts and practices from Europe" (Gottschild "Digging the Africanist" xiv).
[108] "I use it here to signify African and African American resonances and presences, trends, and phenomena" (Gosttschild "Digging the Africanist" xiv).

> with principles explored in classical ballet and add the gesturality and memory that is so alive in Candomblé and in our quotidian life memory. (Silvestre)

Silvestre's words about her teaching experience encourage a reflection on the importance of this fundamental shift in her career. Despite the fact that classical ballet and modern dance were the primary movement languages/methods/techniques Silvestre was introduced to when she initiated her formal studies in dance, her previous informal connection with Candomblé and Afro-Indigenous culture were formative in Silvestre's artistic identity and signature. "Dance of memory" or "dance of essence" were titles she used to describe her classes before she began to call it Silvestre Technique (Silvestre).

The alternative grammar Silvestre currently proposes through her dance methodology is characterized by its intrinsic relationship with the elements of nature and the Orixás, the entanglement of dance-music and body-sound, and an expansion of the dancing body she re-imagines as the *corpo universo,* or "body universe." The body universe is symbolized by three triangles aligned from the top of the head to a central point between the feet and encapsulated in a big diamond (or two larger triangles) whose lateral vertices are opened and indicate ways of human-cosmos communication when pointing up, and the possibility of connecting with the supreme force of the universe when pointing down. The triangles are inhabited by the four elements of nature and corresponding vibrations of the Orixás, and by the seven main [Indian] chakras along the spine. The big diamond is surrounded by a circle that represents a cycle of continuity

symbolized by a multicolored circular line with an indication that this space is a "harmonic stage," as observed in diagram 4.[109]

Diagram 4 is the most complete version of Silvestre's conceptualization of the body universe. According to the dancer-choreographer-educator, the process of developing this diagram started with an insight she had during a moment of concentration[110] in a class. Later she combined the image she had that day of the three triangles in her students' bodies with other areas of knowledge—sacred geometry and Yoruba and Indian philosophy—to strengthen its foundations. The three foundational triangles are imagined as being located in positions that follow the musculoskeletal structure of the body: from the top of the head to the shoulders, with the main vertices pointing upward, the triangle of perception or visualization; from the shoulders to the belly button, with the main vertices pointing down, the triangle of expression; and from the hips to the central point between the feet, with the main pointing down, the triangle of balance.

[109] Diagram 4 was created by Rosangela Silvestre, who worked in partnership with a designer. This diagram encompasses all the elements that constitute the body universe. It was borrowed from Silvestre's personal archive.

[110] I identify Silvestre Technique and Symbology of the Orixás' class structure divided into three moments. The moment of concentration is characterized by an initial moment with focus on the opening of channels of communication with the self, ancestors, nature, cosmos, space, and others.

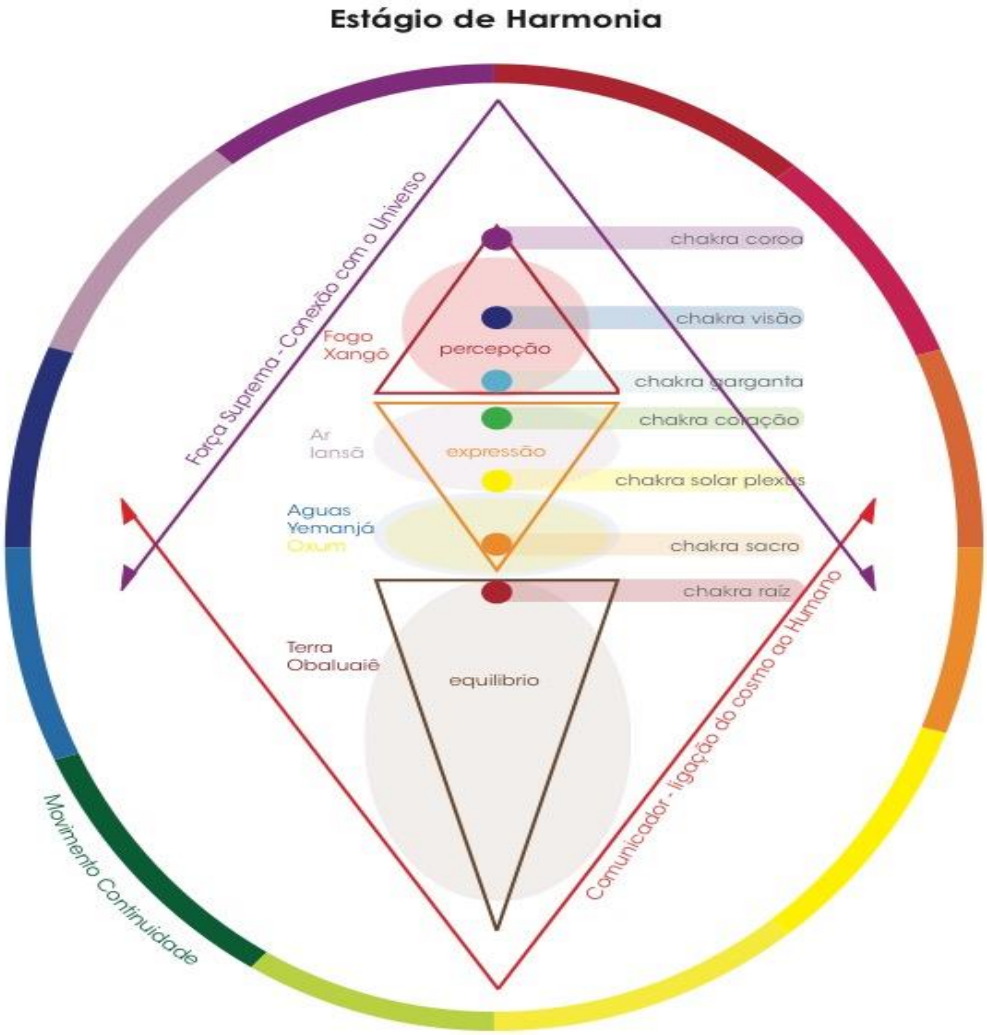

Figure 4: Diagram 4 - Harmony Stage. Continuity Movement (rainbow-colored circle); Supreme Force (purple half of diamond); Communicator: cosmos-human connection (red half of diamond).Example of Heading 8,h8 format.

Diagram 1, representing the foundational triangles, demonstrates not only how Silvestre associates geometric figures with specific human senses, but also how the diagram engenders what I call playing with instability. While the neck and head are linked to perception and visualization, characterizing the part of the diagram/body that

tends to facilitate communication with intuition, creativity, and spiritual energy, the balance of the lower limbs denotes a space that helps one to stay connected to reality. Although the triangle of balance suggests an idea of grounding and stability, it is the search for this balance that Silvestre engages in her dancing. As she asserts, "every triangle pointing downward is linked to reality and insecurities. It is linked not to what you have to confront but to what you have to give attention to in order to improve. It is the triangle of one's equilibrium" (Silvestre). In this regard, by using the lens of black feminisms and my theories of black women's creations of alternative axes of action to analyze Silvestre's comment and diagram, I read this triangle as a space for negotiation and playing with instability. In analyzing the position of the triangle of balance in relation to a flat surface, and by imagining the possibility of movement that bodies hold, the one vertex that is imagined as the main point of support for the entire body seems like a vulnerable support; a support that requires the ability of the one triangle to keep the other triangles and the body organized and in equilibrium. Lateral movements are expected, and the return to center or the slight continuation of movement negotiating between lateral and center is a metaphor of one's ability to negotiate with what Silvestre refers to as "insecurities." By looking at diagram 1 and adding the imaginary lines touched when the body faces systemic pushes that cause insecurities, the diagram is re-imagined as in

the figures below.

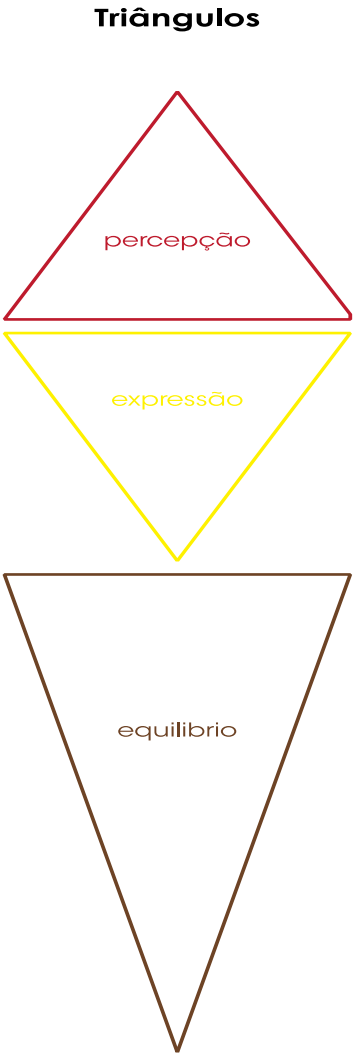

Figure 5: Diagram 1- Triangles. Balance (brown); expression (yellow); perception (red).[111]

[111] I will work with a designer to create variations of this diagram in which the triangle on the basis moves slightly to the sides.

Expression of the self and of identity is one of the most important principles in Silvestre's pedagogy. In the torso, between the two spatially extreme triangles and energies, there is the triangle of expression that occupies a central part of the body through which emotions and messages are captured and transmitted. One enduring image for Silvestre that became a reference for the way she localizes expressivity is that of her great-grandfather telling her, while pointing to her chest, "Here lives your light." Silvestre interpreted that light as the presence and essence or subjectivity of the One. This affirmation and revelation of a fully embraced self then became imperative in her process of body training.

A study of sacred geometry allowed Silvestre to understand the connection with the elements of nature and "the connection with the elements of the nature are favored by the Orixás" (Silvestre). The configuration of the three triangles linked to this additional information opened Silvestre's eyes to the other layers that influence the way the body moves in space, communicating with one's ancestors, the self, and others. Although in Silvestre's diagrams these entities are not represented, based on my experience with Silvestre Technique, I identify these entities' spaces of communication in between triangles and locations. I imagine the space of communication with the ancestors underfoot: the earth and the ground. In this sense, it would be more closely linked to the triangle of balance and the element earth. The space of communication with others, I imagine in between the eyes of two individuals or two body universes, located in between two triangles of visualization and the fire element. There is also a gesture of appreciation that works as a way of communicating with others. In class, Silvestre usually introduces participants to this gesture that consists of two hands placed in front of the chest facing

outward, with elbows bent. This gesture is used to communicate with the musicians, drums, and divine energies and is located in the area of the triangle of expression and the elements of air and water. Communication with others would thus be linked to the two triangles: the triangle of visualization and the triangle of expression. Finally, the space of communication with the self I imagine in relation to an inner space crossing the three triangles and spaces in between; from the space underfoot to the space above the top of the head.

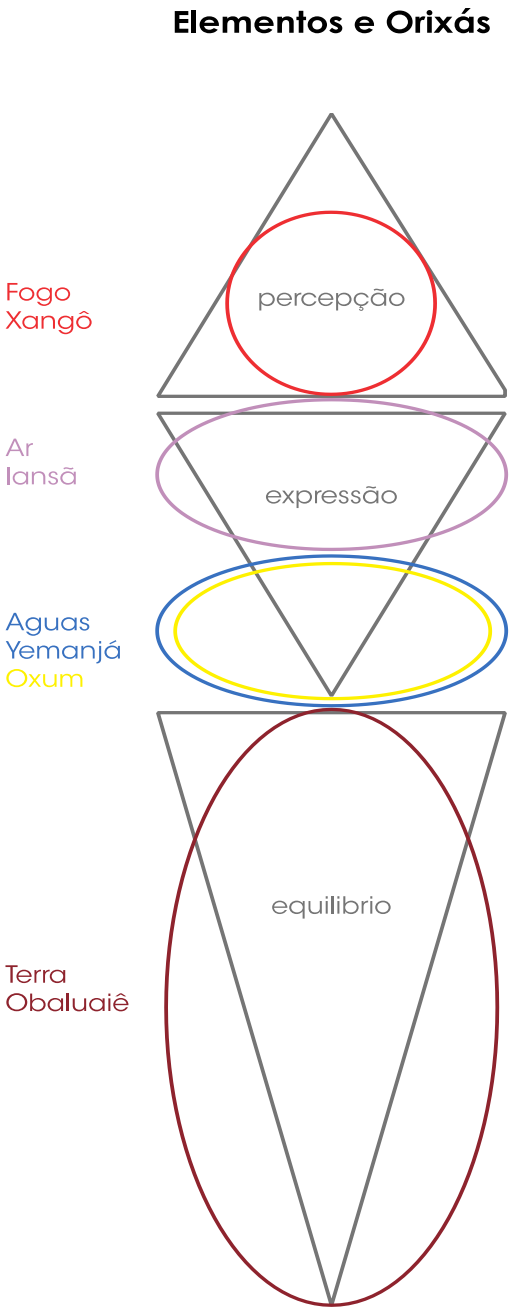

Figure 6: Diagram 2 – Brown oval: Obaluaiê/earth; Yellow and blue ovals: Iyemonjá and Oxum/water; Lavender oval: Iansã/air; Red circle: Xangô/fire.

The most significant components of these triangles are the four elements of nature and the Orixás who vibrate with them, according to Yoruba cosmology. In diagram 2 it is possible to see that the earth element offers support to the whole body, filling out the triangle of balance. The legs are the limbs that both support and allow the body's displacement throughout space. The vibrations of Ogum, Exu, Obaluaiê, Ossain, and Oxossi gain emphasis in this area of the body. These are Orixás linked to more earthly vibrations, a "heavy aspect and debrief associated with the element earth" (Lépine 25). As Claude Lépine notes, the earth is associated with both fertility and sterility, pestilence and death. Obaluaiê, the earth Orixá, is related to sickness and transformation in the human body (Sabino and Lody 135). Exu, the messenger and facilitator of communication between men, ancestors, and divinities, lives in the streets and has a trickster quality, a characteristic close to human aspects; Ogum, the warrior and pathfinder, is related to the creation of tools for human survival, tools used in agriculture and war; Ossain, the protector of plants and the forest, is essential for health and eating. Oxossi, the hunter, the one who provides food for his community, has a close relationship to animals, plants, trees, and other elements of the forest. All these described energies and characteristics inform and or influence this triangle.

In the lower part of the triangle of expression, water is the element that inspires movement, and the vibrations of Iyemonjá, Oxum, Euá, Nanã and Oxalá govern this region. The water that comes from the earth and sky entities are linked to fecundity, beauty, tranquility, and the absence of aggression (Lépine 25). Iyemonjá, the great mother, half fish-half woman, is associated with the sea. Oxum, the mother of fresh

water—rivers and waterfalls, the water that humans drink for survival—is also linked to fertility, beauty, and sensuality. Oxalá is associated with the waters that come from the sky. Nanã, related to both earth and water, depending on the quality of the Orixás, represents the water found in mud, the mud used to create human beings.

The upper part of the same triangle represents the air and the energy of Iansã or Oyá, sense of freedom to move. Silvestre relates jumps, turns, and more expansive and free movements with this element. Finally, the triangle of perception is permeated by the fire and the vibrations of Xangô. As Silvestre's great-grandfather's words I mentioned above resonated in her memory with the images she remembered from Candomblé ceremonies, the justice and intense presence of Xangô stood out to her. Her great-grandfather pointed to her chest and talked about her "light," but he also used to show her images of Catholic saints calling attention to the yellow circle around their heads, which usually represents their auras. She decided to study polarity energy balancing and she learned that the fire is in diverse parts of the body, including the head. "And this fire is the fire of light, the fire of spirituality, it is not the fire of your ego" (Silvestre). Silvestre creates links between these memories, her studies, and her experience with movement. Oyá is also associated with fire, according to the quality attributed to her. Although the elements receive emphasis in the place where they are located in the body, they are fluid and infiltrate movements partially and in the body's totality.

The vertical alignment of the three triangles is made flexible by Silvestre's reference to the seven main Indian chakras. As I suggest in the first chapter, one of the main standards of Western canonic dance techniques is the vertical alignment "with arm

and leg movements emanating from it and returning to it" (Gottschild "Digging the Africanist" 8). The canon models of verticality describe this as an uninflected position that indicates elegance and neutrality in relation to the efforts employed by the moving body during its performances. Silvestre proposes that we think about the spine and its vertical position in the body universe as it is crossed by opened channels: the chakras. From the top of the head to the sacrum are the chakras of crown, vision, throat, heart, plexus, sacrum, and root along with the corresponding colors adding spaces of energetic mobility to this alignment. Silvestre also refers to Oxumarê, known as the great serpent whose premise is the mobility of the elements of nature (Sabino and Lody 137), embodied in the spine. Even Oxumarê's dance is sinuous and delineates trajectories characterized by undulating lines. In her workshop in Austin on April 28, 2018, Silvestre used the ways of walking as an example to suggest that vertical alignment is expected to be the way that bodies generally move in daily life. Yet, she stressed the cases in which anatomic factors do not allow the body to walk and move in a vertical line, saying: "we have to be respectful, too!" (Silvestre). Silvestre's sinuous and open-channel verticality offers an alternative to think about body alignment. In diagram 3, the chakras are added to the already existing elements that constitute the body universe.

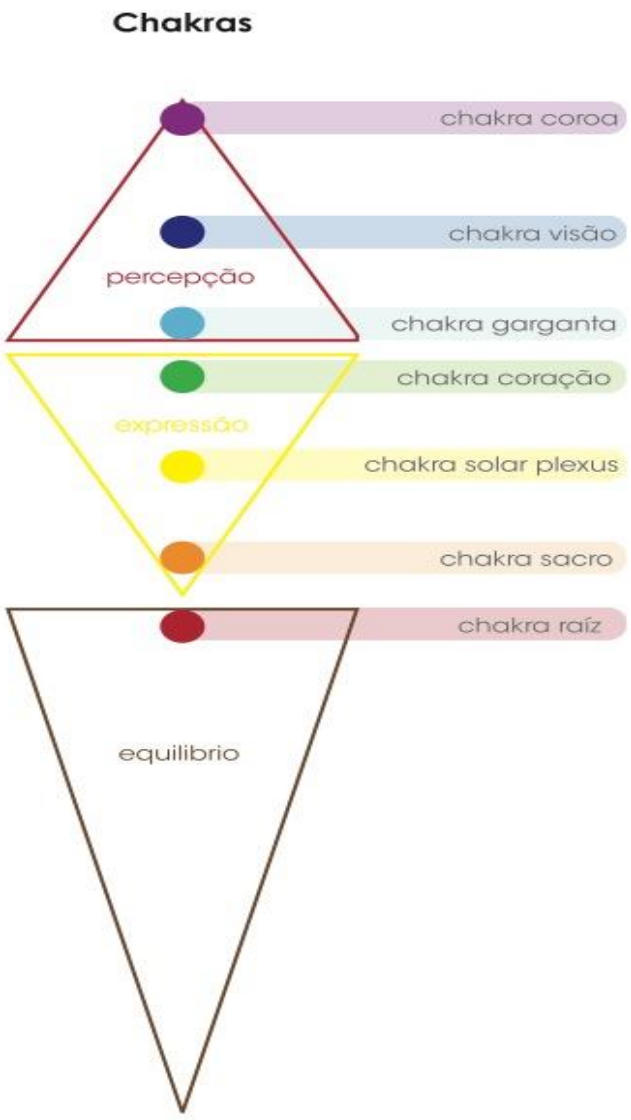

Figure 7: Diagram 3 – Root chakra (red); sacrum chakra (orange); plexus chakra (yellow); heart chakra (green); throat chakra (blue); crown chakra (purple).

The conceptualization of a body universe, or this particular perspective of a body-space interface, offers a differential in relation to previous Western-based notions and representations of this human-body relationship, space, and the surrounding world. As

observed in diagram 4, the body universe proposed by Silvestre encompasses three layers (triangles, natural elements, and the vibrations of the Orixás) that are immersed in a triangle indicating the directions employed to orient body movement—an opened triangle from the earth pointing up to facilitate the human-cosmos communication and from the space above the head pointing down to facilitate a connection with a supreme force of the universe. The circle around the body is imagined as a harmonic stage that is reached when the body finds equilibrium in its way of being and moving physically, socially, and politically, which Silvestre also calls a full presence or vibratory presence.[112] In imagining a body that relates to the cosmos, the energy represented from the center where the body is drawn, Silvestre moves beyond what Rudolph Laban describes as the "kinesphere" and the geometric figures where the possibilities of movement are imagined. In *The Language of Movement – a Guidebook to Choreutics,* Laban describes the kinesphere as a "sphere around the body whose periphery can be reached by easily extended limbs without stepping away from that place which is the point of support when standing on one foot, what we shall call 'stance' " (Laban "*The language of Movement*" 10).[113]

In Laban's reflection of the body movement, the kinesphere determines the dimension of its physical presence and possibilities of movement. Thus, the circle is

[112] This assertion is based on Silvestre's comment during the interview in 2016 in which she highlights the importance for her of students being fully present in the studio. Silvestre says that she encourages students to bring the aspects of social, emotional, and political] life to the studio. (Silvestre)

[113] As I mentioned in the introduction, Rudolph Laban's movement analysis and studies around body movement do not include black bodies or black dancing bodies, once he denied the possibility of "creation" or "creative art" being produced by black people. My engagement with this author is to question this model that became universally studied throughout history and which is anchored in a white European vision. See Laban's words in *Life for Dance*.

indeed around the body. As Ciane Fernandes observes, this circle can be expanded or retracted according to the movements of the body and follows the body everywhere, when it is in motion. Laban imagines that the body organizes its movements in space by drawing invisible lines between the vertices of the geometric figures of the cube, icosahedron, octahedron, dodecahedron, and tetrahedron (Fernandes 190). The kinesphere varies according to these figures but the space he explores emphasizes the body as central and its personal and interactive spaces. In this regard, Imgard Barttenieff expands this notion by proposing a spatial intention, yet, like Laban, the emphasis is still in the body (Fernandes 69). These perspectives allow the individual to reflect on a projection and extension of muscular and skeletal structures, but not to reflect on the body beyond itself and as part of a larger context, or within larger multiple circles, as we observe in the work of Friedensreich Hundertwasser (1972), an artist-activist from Vienna.

Hundertwasser's theory of the five skins argues that "humans live and express their political and social identity" within five layers (Day).[114] This important artist-activist, concerned with sustainability and the quality of life, proposes a new aesthetic concept to the human-nature interface in which the body is respectively surrounded/encircled by the following: the epidermis, clothing, houses, identity, and the earth, which are immersed in an "outside universe." In his diagram, it is possible to notice the centrality of the body but also the other elements and instances. Hundertwasser's way

[114] Provided bibliographic reference and image under "Day" and Hardy-Grouleau, Gil at the website https://theinterfaceeffect.weebly.com/hundertwasser-and-the-five-skins.html

of imagining the body adds layers to Laban's diagram[115]. While Hundertwasser adds layers outside the limits of the body, Silvestre adds layers inside them.

As I mentioned before, Silvestre's diagrams represent both the elements of nature and vibrations of the Orixás inside the body. In other words, the physical body encompasses these two other layers inside it. In this case, the two layers represented outside the body are the energies directed toward the relationship of the body with supreme forces and the cosmos; and a circle of continuity, which I relate to an association with ancestry and cycles of life.[116] Silvestre's diagram reveals the circle of continuity that encapsulates the human-nature-cosmos interface. Fire, air, water, and earth, vibrations of the Orixás, and the chakras are visualized inside the triangles, crossing them and, although there is no silhouette of a human body in her diagrams, the organization of triangles is clearly overlapping the human body. Unlike Laban and Hundertwasser, Silvestre complicates the anthropocentric vision by imagining no separation between the body-self, nature, and the divinities. To her, the human is not only in the center. The human body occupies the same space as nature and the divine forces. Thus, the union of human-nature-divinities are central to her perspective. As she said in one class, "you can feel the forest inside you" (Silvestre) to call students' attention to their possibilities of accessing their own memories; images and energies of the natural elements inside themselves.

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[115] A image of this diagram can be observed in the following website https://thespaceintherelationship.wordpress.com/kinesphere/

[116] This is based on the concept of *Ori* and the earth-centered understanding of supreme forces. *Ori*, a Yoruba term used in Candomblé, refers to the "head, soul, and [to] the human's elements connected to the ancestors," which expands the physical body part to also consider its relationship to the spiritual.

Silvestre's "universal" approach

Notions of universality have been associated with classic Western thought and whiteness throughout history. As a consequence, specificities of blackness have received critiques in relation to this concept. As Mollie Godfrey asserts in "Rewriting White, Rewriting Black: Authentic Humanity and Authentic Blackness in Nella Larsen's 'Sanctuary'," during the Harlem Renaissance era:

> White critics often measured artistic value in terms of a work's supposed universality, but they barred black art for being considered universal in two ways: first, by dismissing such work as imitative whenever it looked too much like white art (either in style or in characterization); and second, by dismissing it as primitive or racially particular whenever it was recognizably black. (Godfrey 122)

Despite the fact that Silvestre does not demonstrate a conscious awareness of or concern for these critiques, I propose a brief reflection on Silvestre's use of the universal as it relates to blackness, arguing that while Silvestre's work presents a connection with nature, as in Yoruba Cosmology, a premise that would easily make her work fit into the dominant "dismissing [of her art] as primitive or racially particular," she is also positioning the universal as Afro-Brazilian-centered, providing a different reference to that notion and some resistance to these critiques.

Silvestre approaches the universe/universal in two ways, though the terms are primarily related to the idea of a cosmologic dimension. If on the one hand most of the times Silvestre employs the term "universe," meaning "all existing matter and space considered as a whole,"[117] especially when associated with the body or the body-cosmos relationship, on the other hand, it is possible to find moments in which she also engages

[117] Provided bibliographic reference is listed under "Silvestre Technique Training."

with the universal when referring to the global scope of her work. In the following examples her reference to the universe as the cosmos is clear, which I do not identify as a complicated connotation: 1) “Find a discipline and improve your body skills with technique, but don't forget to dance. Don't forget to listen to the Universe and let your body be the instrument of the Universe Dance; your dance, your life. Be Alive!”; 2) “The Silvestre Technique training program has been going on for twenty [-] four years, giving an opportunity to dancers, and anyone who is interested in body technique in general, to study and investigate the unification of symbols that express aspects of the Universe - cosmologically and physically” and; 3) "Dance translates what I cannot say in words. Dance connects me with the Universe. Dance connects me with you."[118] Unlike the latter examples, Silvestre’s use of “universal” relates also to the philosophical concept and the assumption that some ideas have universal reach and applicability. In affirming that “even with the considerable number of students (up to 265 in 2011), the foundation of the program accommodates and integrates the diverse cultural identity that positively enriches the understanding of art as a symbol of universal connection,” Silvestre suggests that the danced language/grammar she proposes speaks to dancers with the most varied backgrounds. The main idea is clearly that diverse bodies are welcomed, but it is presented under a term that, in a different era, was used to impose certain values on ethnic and racial minorities. Silvestre employs a term that has been used throughout history as part of a discourse that advocated for the supremacy of European and white

[118] Provided bibliographic reference is listed under “Silvestre Technique Training.”

epistemologies and methodologies; a strategy that served to make invisible and suppress the real value of "othered" people's knowledge and creations.

In contradistinction to the questionable engagement with a term used to oppress, by associating the universal with a historically discredited knowledge mainly transmitted by historically marginalized bodies—black bodies—Silvestre questions assumptions about the universalism of European and Euro-American dance techniques and studies. In other words, by engaging with the term "universal" to refer to a fundamentally black dance technique created by an Afro-Brazilian artist, Silvestre is complicating culturally dominant "models" of the universal. Through her dance practices mainly rooted in Afro-Indigenous Brazilian culture, Silvestre advocates for this knowledge as a powerful and instrumental source in physical training and development of dance skills. As she argues, the elements of nature, for example, make it accessible to those who are not familiar with Afro-Indigenous Brazilian culture and the Orixás' different vibrations as explored through specific movements in her technique. As she illustrates, "the movement that symbolizes the essence of Osun is the movement that represents water, beauty, gold, the elements. So, when you come to the class, even if you don't know what Osun is, you know what water is, so water is the symbol, the universal symbol that connects people with the essence that inside the Candomblé religion we learn as Osun" ("Silvestre Technique Training").

Indeed, Silvestre has traveled all over the world to teach her technique and the Silvestre Technique training program has attracted students from different places around the globe. Silvestre Technique has been taught by her "multipliers" in Salvador, Buenos

Aires, Boulder, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Oakland, Santa Cruz, New York, Montreal, Toronto, Lilli, Geneva, and Kyoto, which reveals how much her dance-language has facilitated transnational communication. The multipliers, as Silvestre calls them, are dancers who become collaborators in the work of teaching Silvestre Technique in different places of the world. As Silvestre travels, the presence of a multiplier in different cities provides students the opportunity to continue their training and practice when Silvestre or Vera Passos, her co-director, is not there. Vera Passos was Silvestre's first multiplier and currently co-directs the program in Salvador. She became a partner and is responsible for the creation of a group of students and practitioners of Silvestre Technique in Salvador. Passos has contributed to the promotion and strength of Silvestre's technique and pedagogy. In the last five years, Passos has also traveled all over the world, allowing national and international communication and dissemination of their ideas and corporeal research and proposals.

Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that this expansion has led to the significant participation of a majority of white students in her classes. This increase in the participation of white students and their identification with her technique, including multipliers, is not necessarily a problem, since she avoids categorizing her work and limiting it to a determined audience, but it opens up space for a kind of "decorporealization" of her dancing. Similarly, Jasmine Johnson observes that in West African dance classes in the U.S. they

> […] initially began as a redefinition of American blackness *vis-à-vis* a proximity to Africa in the 1970s, and [have] since grown into a wide-reaching niche that is

> today unmistakably characterized by the vast number of white American women who patronize these spaces. (Johnson 41)

In addition to showing the increased participation of white women in West African dance classes in the U.S., Johnson argues that "the space underwent a major transformation: diasporic belonging became increasingly democratized, and Africanness commodified" (41). By engaging with the concept of decorporealization, I am looking at another aspect of the same trend. I am not primarily concerned about the possibility of a local artistic expression that comes from a politically disempowered locality to be "absorbed by macro potencies and commodified" (39), as Thomas DeFrantz (Godder) laments, in agreement with Johnson. Rather, I am primarily and specifically concerned about the risk of this African-derived technique becoming distanced from black bodies. In other words, it is not the possibility of making uniform an extremely nuanced movement terrain, but the possibility of a disassociation of this practice from black bodies. In *Afro-Paradise: Blackness, Violence, and performance in Brazil,* Christen Smith engages with the idea of "recorporealiz[ing] blackness," advocating for the acknowledgement of blackness's "materiality tied to black people and their experiences" (13). The author questions the tendency of some scholars to claim blackness as a "strong Bahian cultural concept that is part of the regional (and by extension national) identity, but not an ethnicity anchored to black bodies or a lived black experience" (13). In proposing a recorporealization of blackness, Smith looks back to the foundations of this concept and to the importance of the corporeal dimension in this case.

In Silvestre Technique, I observe that black bodies are the founders of this language/grammar, as Silvestre draws heavily upon her lived experience with her family's African and Indigenous ancestry and with the Candomblé community. Moreover, most of the main student-colleagues who contributed to the development of her technique when she started to teach and choreograph were black: Zebrinha, Nildinha Fonseca, Vera Passos, Julieta Rodrigues, Janete Santana, Claudia Guedes, myself, the groups Odundê, Balé Folclorico da Bahia, and Dance Brazil, and Escola de Dança da Fundação Cultural da Bahia, among others, were fundamental in Silvestre's process of investigation and elaboration of the technique's fundamentals, and she would often speak with these professionals, continuously asking about their perceptions of her training. Musicians are another factor influencing my perception of this technique as being fundamentally black. Musical Director Ney Sacramento and other musicians, most of whom are black, have experienced life within the *terreiro* and Afro-Indigenous Bahian culture. Corporeally, Silvestre Technique emerged from the lived experiences of black people with the content and methods Silvestre proposes.

This perception of Silvestre Technique's link to black bodies is not a free association I make based solely on my own experience with the dancer-choreographer-educator and the colleagues she cites as being key to her research; I also take into consideration the perception of some of her students and multipliers. An American dancer who participated in Silvestre Technique training in Salvador in 2014, for example, reveals the way she perceived Silvestre's work both before and after she experienced it. She asserts that, alongside other American dancers' recommendations about Silvestre's

work, by looking at the website she noticed that the training in Salvador "sounded like it was modern dance for black people, or modern dance for black bodies" (Jones). The student mentions that by noting the connection of modern dance, black bodies, and nature she felt attracted to it, especially because it seemed to be a technique that would create space for her black dancing body. As she said, "I love modern dance but I don't feel like I always fit in it." Silvestre's training seemed to offer something different. The same student, after experiencing the intensive program and taking classes on the Symbology of the Orixas and Silvestre Technique, describes Silvestre's work as a "contemporary investigation into how black bodies move. She did not say it is for black bodies but it is the lens she is using" (Jones). In illuminating the black bodies as the lens Silvestre uses in her training, the student reinforces my perception of an intrinsic relationship between Silvestre's work and those black dancing bodies. Vera Passos, a multiplier, also highlights in a TV show interview: "when I begin to dance, my choice for Rosangela was the one of following a black woman, from my land, who would be talking about my culture"[119] (Passos in "Batemos um Papo"). In emphasizing Silvestre's blackness and cultural connection as the main elements of attraction for her work with Silvestre, Vera Passos, who identifies as a black woman, points to the connection of this methodology with a black female body as a fundamental factor in her decision to become a multiplier.

This reflection is not about cultural appropriation; however, it goes further to emphasize the detachment of this dance from a reconnection with embodied memories that were supposed to be discarded but which Silvestre re-embraced. My question is: Can

[119] Provided bibliographic reference is listed under "Batemos um Papo".

Silvestre's mentors, influencers of her technique, and students/collaborators who contributed with Silvestre when she first started and remain associated with her dancing provide enough support to keep the Silvestre Technique-black bodies connection strong? It is important to mention the increase in the number of white students in her training, not only outside the country but also in her classes in Brazil. If in 2014 at least a half of students were white, as Jones noticed, in 2016, less than one-third of the students were black—at least among the ones who were involved in the full program.[120] Among North and South American multipliers, I noticed a significant presence of white dancers as well. One of these multipliers, a white woman, said she has a group that works specifically with Afro-Brazilian dances as an inspiration for her choreographies in the U.S. In a video clip of a performance by this group there were five dancers performing, all of whom were white. Based on a history of rendering Africanist roots and black bodies' participation in the creation of certain art forms invisible, as Gottschild demonstrates in *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performances: Dance and Other Contexts,* I find this reflection important.

Symbology of the Orixás: Spiritual as political in Silvestre's approach

The spiritual is addressed in Silvestre's dance practices—Silvestre Technique and the Symbology of the Orixás—in two different ways. First, the physical-spiritual union is fundamentally encouraged in both classes. The expression of one's essence or self through movement and the continuous search for the vibratory presence suggests the

[120] The Silvestre Technique Intensive Program allows students to either take sporadic and specific classes or to enroll in the full program, taking classes such as Silvestre Technique, Symbology of the Orixás, Capoeira, classical ballet, etc.

involvement of one's entire being. Spiritual is, in this case, clearly addressed in its broader meaning of something that affects the human spirit and soul. There is no religious connotation in this case. Second, Silvestre is directly inspired by spiritual practices and dances performed within a religious context or sacred spaces. In this sense, the content of her classes comes from the religious, but because they are addressed outside the religious space or in dance studios, they gain another meaning. While, according to Yvonne Daniel ("African Diaspora Dance"), the religious context in African-derived liturgies aims to "maintain spiritual knowledge for the well-being of ritual family," (149) the concert dance space, or the studio, is "motivated by theatrical considerations and performed primarily for the entertainment of others," (44) as Kariamu Welsh Asante argues. In this sense, although Silvestre seeks a more "self"-related dancing in her classes, she differentiates the two contexts by saying "we call them dances because we bring them to the studio, but in fact, these dances are prayers" (Silvestre). Instead of highlighting the entertainment as a focus of her dancing,[121] she illuminates the fact that in the religious context practitioners do not look at those movements as choreographies and they are not concerned about shape, execution, space, amplitude of the movements, rhythm, or other factors. In the Candomblé ceremony these movements are the way practitioners communicate with the divinities.

[121] Although it is not Silvestre's main focus, in the intensive program in Salvador and other countries as well it is possible to identify students who were attracted by this "fun" side of her dancing. During her classes, Silvestre usually pose provocative questions about the one's main interest and objective there (in her class).

Following the religious ceremonial structure of the *Xire*,[122] Silvestre typically opens this part of class in which Candomblé rhythms start to dialogue with movement using the *Avania* rhythm. In the religious ceremony, *Avania* is a rhythm played at the beginning of the ceremony to honor all the Orixás as soon as the practitioners come into the *barracão*, the room where the public ceremonies are conducted. This moment introduces dancers to a movement vocabulary and symbols that serve to open up their perceptions and body-selves to navigate through each specific Orixá's vibration. This moment is fundamental to prepare the dancers and make them more confident to experience the moments of improvisation Silvestre proposes in many of her classes. In the workshop she taught in Austin, Texas, in April 2018, for example, she explored a sequence of walking or running, then stopping to point the index fingers up and down, suggesting a vibration that combined mysterious and sarcastic behavior. Participants entered the space of the circle running, stopped, looked around at the others, and left the circle running. There was sarcastic laughter as well as mysterious, slow turning around the self. This was a moment to embody the vibration of Exu, rather than a moment to explore many symbols. The fingers pointing in different directions, the text read out loud from a card chosen by one of the participants, and the few words that Silvestre provided about this Orixá, all inspired that moment of the class.

The connection between spiritual and political can be observed in Silvestre's practices in accordance with Audre Lorde's assertion that the spiritual-political dichotomy is false (page). Silvestre not only encourages a reconnection with the voice of

[122] Check note number 3.

the ancestors but also references current actions and everyday struggles while teaching symbols and movements borrowed from different Orixás. In the workshop I mentioned above, she evoked the vibration of the warrior Ogum and used his strong, sharp, precise movements to refer to the daily struggles of women who take care of family, complete their graduate studies, and/or overcome sexist oppressions in society. While demonstrating the sword-like arm movements of Ogum, Silvestre said: "It is not only war, it is life" (Silvestre). In saying that, she meant that the same strong energy, the determined gaze focused on the direction in which the one will move, and the precision and decisive attitude adopted when changing directions may all be engaged in other contexts. Determination and clarity about the way the one chooses to follow are key to the process of accomplishment, achievement, and even affirmation of oneself in society.

Another example important in understanding Silvestre's link between the spiritual and the political is her affirmation that Brazilian dance is not only about smiles and fun. It is also about the history of a people who confronted and still confront challenges in life, and it involves themes that are not always about Carnival and celebrations. She asserts that this content requires critical reflection and must be seriously considered and performed.

Pedagogical premises and aspects of black feminisms

Among the main premises I have identified in Silvestre's pedagogy, there are few I link to characteristics of black feminisms. In moving forward, using and creating opportunities for her own and other women's survival and development through their art,

I argue that Silvestre is helping to encourage women's investigation of and struggle for liberation in dance. As an educator, Silvestre is inspired by her grandmother, who did not know how to write or read well but showed her a "door that would make freedom in life possible; the door to formal education" (Silvestre). According to Silvestre, her grandmother not only provided the family education but also made efforts to provide for her formal education, working to support Silvestre's dance studies and private classes after school, since she could not help her with homework, and preparation for exams. Silvestre was able to graduate and complete her specialization at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA). Currently, she is considered a leader in the world of contemporary Afro-Brazilian dance; she is the founder of Silvestre Technique, with expertise in Symbology of Orixá dance and international experience performing and choreographing with dance companies and artists such as Balé Folclórico da Bahia (Salvador-BA), Dance Brazil (New York - NY), Cleo Parker Robinson Dance (Denver - CO), Viver Brasil Dance Company (Los Angele - CA), and Steve Coleman (New York - NY), among others.

Silvestre's personal experience serves as her political statement. Her trajectory as a black woman, raised by another black woman who envisioned a better future for her granddaughter and had to overcome financial and social challenges to provide it, are fundamental in Silvestre's career development. Moreover, Silvestre's own work primarily based on African and Indigenous Brazilian elements is part of a personal process of "observing, absorbing, discarding," and later re-approximating her memories. In her pedagogy, Silvestre speaks a language that reflects this personal trajectory,

communicating with other black women and re-imagining dance body training and artistic acts and creations "through the lens" of black bodies.

Silvestre's primary claim in her teaching is for the evocation of personal stories through dancing. During the training she often asks for the expression, communication, and delivery of "your messages" (Silvestre). By "your messages," Silvestre means a person's subjectivity formed by his or her lived experience. In this regard, I consider the principle of "expressing personal messages"—bringing the "authentic" self to the dance floor—as an extension of what Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor highlights as a feminist principle: that is the personal is political. Silvestre's bodily black language speaks about not only her experience but also about the experience of other black female bodies who have to deal with the implications of racial, class, and sexual oppression in life and in the field of dance. Silvestre Technique acknowledges the power of our histories and memories by allowing, respecting, and valuing the expression of our subjectivities and selves as they (we) are.

Another premise observed in Silvestre's pedagogy is the notion that "[we] move forward (stepping forward) but [we] do not forget where [we] came from (stepping backward)" (Silvestre). During her classes, Silvestre is emphatic in claiming a connection with the voices of the ancestors and a recognition of one's entangled trajectory in terms of time—she understands that the future intersects with the past, which happens in the present.[123] In looking back, one may recognize the importance of those who came first:

[123]Provided bibliographic reference is listed under "Lembrando Lélia Gonzales) at http://www.casadeculturadamulhernegra.org.br/mulheres-negras/textos/)

the people who built the foundations of one's existence as a person and as an artist. The ancestors who are evoked are not always close references, but sometimes those we did not know personally we know were those who opened the ways for present actions and opportunities. In a remarkable text presented by Hilton Cobra at the Carlos Gomes Theatre in July 1994 in Rio de Janeiro, Néia Daniel honored intellectual, politician, professor and anthropologist Lélia Gonzalez by telling a story about "an Amazon [who arrived in a tribe] wearing a turban with the colors of hope, riding a black horse as our ancestry" ("Lembrando Lélia Gonzales") to tell stories of women warriors and black Egyptian civilizations. "What she wanted all the time was to pass on to the tribespeople an understanding of the things they saw around them. All the time she spoke of the perspicacity on the way other tribes operated" (Daniel in "Lembrando Lélia Gonzales"). In telling this story, N. Daniel calls attention to the importance of knowing the work of other generations. In the case of black feminisms, as Taylor observes, "contemporary Black feminism is the outgrowth of countless generations of personal sacrifice, militancy, and work by our mothers and sisters" (Taylor 16). The link between these principles inspired me to reflect on Silvestre's pedagogical strategy of "stepping back to move forward: recognizing the presence of countless generations" in tune with black feminisms' acknowledgement of black women's previous struggles and achievements, and the importance of ancestry in the history they are writing.

Alongside the strong work Silvestre develops in terms of encouraging an investigation and ongoing search for one's self and artistic identity rooted in self-knowledge and ancestry, she creates an environment that involves self-love, self-respect,

and love and respect for others. Silvestre frequently opens her class by talking about the importance of being in tune with the body in order to find harmony and being in tune with the space, sounds, others, and the cosmos. To be in tune with the body, in her view, involves the search for a healthy body that respects its own limits and acknowledges the best way to improve one's dancing skills. As she says when describing the main premises of her technique, "these are only suggestions" (Silvestre). Silvestre encourages students to pay attention to the way this methodology resonates with their particular physicality and "inspirituality."[124] She insists that it is crucial to find other ways to work with dance if the way she is offering is not "treating their bodies well" (Silvestre). In asserting that, Silvestre positions their well-being and healing as the most important aspect for her, even if that means one needs to leave this practice.

In the same way, when teaching at the *Casa das Pretas* (Black Women's House) in Rio de Janeiro, Vera Passos, who follows Silvestre's pedagogical premises, reinforces the importance of one's affective relation to the dancing. Passos says:

> My work focuses on where dance can take you. The idea is to be nourished by dance to move the world, to take more love to the communities, more determination, more hope; [wishing that] each day we have less inequality and more respect, more tolerance, and that we can understand each other in the world." (Passos) [125]

Casa das Pretas is a project of the non-profit organization "*Coisa de Mulher*" (Woman's Thing), founded by and for black women in Brazil in 1994. The organization

[124] Silvestre uses this term as a portmanteau of the words "inspiration" and "spirituality." By using this term, she aims to suggest that spirituality inspires creation in her perception.

[125] "Meu trabalho é voltado para onde a dança pode te levar. A idéia é de se alimentar da dança para mover o mundo, para levar mais amor para as comunidades, mais determinação, mais esperança; para que cada dia nós tenhamos menos desigualdades e mais respeito, mais tolerância e que a gente possa se entender no mundo" (Passos).

aims to develop actions that can promote political and social changes for them. In that space, Passos was speaking to a group consisting primarily of black women. In this sense, Passos was speaking directly to black women whom she identified as part of the "family"[126] that she and Silvestre are creating. These women will be able to multiply and feed their communities with love, the love she aimed to awaken through dance.

By referring again to Taylor's writing on the Combahee River Collective and the politics of black feminisms, I observe how love serves as an important principle. Taylor's words stood out to me: "The only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work" (Taylor 18). This assertion introduces another idea that permeates Silvestre's practice: shared work.

Throughout her career and especially since the growth of Silvestre Technique, Silvestre has contributed to the professional training of black dancers in Salvador. Alongside the increasing number of white students in her international courses and white multipliers teaching Silvestre Technique outside Brazil, the group that works with her in Salvador has been developed and expanded to guarantee the proper functioning of the intensive program. In addition to their involvement with dance classes, students participate in the enrollment and orientation of new students, coordination of class times

[126] Silvestre used to call the participants in her studies a big family that she and other multipliers, musicians, and students are creating. "Family" here gains a meaning related to community built upon ties; ties of love and presence in the lives of others. (This information is based on Silvestre's conversations recorded during my fieldwork. In the first meeting before the training began, she briefly discussed this idea.)

and locations, checking attendance, administrative roles, and teaching. This growing group is mostly composed of black dancers, especially black women.

Silvestre has shared her work, responsibilities, and the benefits of learning and developing these skills throughout the years. "In 2018, I transferred the general direction of the Intensive Silvestre Technique program to Emilena," Silvestre commented (Silvestre). Emilena Santos, a black woman dancer and cultural studies researcher, has collaborated with Silvestre since 2009, working mainly with the administration of the intensive program and Silvestre's assistance. Now she has taken over the general direction of the program, a position previously occupied by Silvestre. Similarly, I observed the example of Vera Passos, who started as a partner and currently holds her own reputation in relation to Silvestre Technique in Salvador. She has also traveled as much as Silvestre around Brazil and other cities in Latin America and the U.S.

Another example of a multiplier who has been growing within this "family" is Deko Alves, the only male multiplier – he is a black, gay, male.[127] Alves says that the first time he heard about Silvestre's intensive program, after coming into contact with the technique through Passos, he wanted to study with Silvestre but he could not afford the cost of taking her classes. He went to Silvestre and explained his financial situation. Silvestre replied: "We can find something to exchange. I am sure you have something to give me in return. What can you give me in exchange?" He did not know at that time what he could offer but immediately Silvestre asked: "Can you check the attendance?" (Alves). He said yes. Alves started checking attendance, then he worked with the

[127] Deko Alves identified as black, gay, male, in the interview.

enrollment process, and concomitantly, taking classes and working in the studio. A few years later, Alves became a multiplier and he continues to take on more responsibility and grow as a professional each year. Silvestre's pedagogy exceeds the limits of a dance studio and encourages one to believe in even greater potential.

Alongside Silvestre's sharing of her work and the benefits and achievements it can bring, Silvestre recognizes that her current work is the result of collaborations with and support from others; in other words, it comes from shared work. By looking back at the year when Silvestre asked me along with other three black female dancers to participate in the first video recording of her "initial conversations"—sequences of her technique— I feel part of the dance-making she has been going through. In 2000, I contributed to her analysis and research while developing the Silvestre Technique fundamentals, something she replicated and reproduced with other dancers in Salvador. In a certain way, I collaborated with Silvestre on the creation of what I observe today as a complex and strong method of body training. Similarly, in 2014, one of the things that impressed me the most, when meeting Silvestre again, was the perception of how expanded her work had become. Silvestre was teaching about 245 students from all over the world in Salvador, and there were other black women "multiplying" this work. They were finding a way to support their living and develop their artistic careers with the support of another black woman's initiative. In this regard, if Silvestre uses "universal appeal" to leave her work open and accessible to all dancers, in practice, I perceive that there is a large number of black women in positions of leadership in the process of

professionalization and training of dancer-choreographer-educators, forming the basis of Silvestre's "family."

Two other specific aspects I observe in Silvestre's pedagogy that are fundamental for her communication with dancers and with her own corporeality are the openness to the symbols that emerge in the "present moment" and the vocalization of movements. Although I do not relate these strategies to specific premises of black feminisms, I consider these aspects to be reflections of her experiences as a black woman. Silvestre's experiences in the *terreiro* were fundamental to the importance of being attentive at all times to the "signs" and to the experiences such as the ones in which her grandparents taught her to vocalize while moving. Silvestre is always prepared but simultaneously open to adapting her class plan according to the moment and elements that encourage her to take a certain direction and make determined choices in her teaching. Moreover, by improvising the vocalization of movements or by vocally expressing the way each movement resonates, Silvestre offers a different way for dancers to access movements and their stories.

Silvestre says she is always open to the symbols in order to delineate the content of each encounter. In the workshops she taught in Austin in 2018, for example, before she entered the studio, another dance teacher suddenly opened the door of the studio opposite hers to greet Silvestre. Through the open door we could see a group of young children and a big rainbow drawn on the floor. At that moment, Silvestre looked at me and said, "You see? This is a sign. The symbol just showed up. I cannot ignore this." (Silvestre) In her dance class, she then explored the movements of Oxumarê, the Orixá who connects

the earth and sky and announces the arrival of the rain—the water's return to earth—through the rainbow. The connection to the energy that was present in that space gave a fresh and vibrant sense to her workshop.

Moreover, I refer to the practice of vocalizing movements as a practice to find specific ways of resonating with the movement and using the voice to express oneself. While teaching, Silvestre often uses onomatopoeic words, an example of which could be transcribed as follows: *kiguibá kedê, kiguibá kedê, kiguibá kedê, kiguibá kedê, vuum*, [pause] *tê dê, vuum* [pause] *tê dê*. While vocalizing this string of onomatopoeias, Silvestre showed a sequence of movements related to Ogum. The sound *vuum* served to highlight the changes in the direction of the body with determination and focus. By using that monosyllabic expression, Silvestre wanted to emphasize the fact that the dancer/mover should look in the direction where she/he was turning with precision, demonstrating that she/he knows in which direction to go and why. In addition to clarifying the intention and meanings related to the movements and symbols, vocalizing facilitates a corporeal memorization of the "spirit" of that movement or nuance that may be engaged. In that particular experience with Ogum's symbology, the "spirit" of a warrior was clearly captured through the vocal element.

How the encounters flow: Silvestre's classes structure/organization

Despite the fact that Silvestre presents the two main dance styles she teaches as complementary to each other, and although she does not define divisions in either methodology, I believe the classes follow a similar organization in terms of the way

content is transmitted. In both Silvestre Technique and Symbology of the Orixás, I identify three main phases into which Silvestre organizes her teaching: first, the moment in which she encourages an initial connection with the self, space/time, and the group; second, the moment in which she leads an experience with specific movement vocabularies; and finally, a moment in which she encourages the use of those vocabularies to move through the space and tell stories—usually including more complex movement combinations and spatial exploration. Below I briefly describe the specificities of each class structure according to my own perception of them.

Symbology of the Orixás

The organization of this class varies slightly according to each particular experience, but it is generally organized into three moments:

1) Arriving physically and spiritually

This moment is conducted in the same way as in Silvestre Technique, as I will detail while describing the moment of concentration. This moment focuses on the breath and the dancer/mover's connection to self in that space and with a holistic environment. The holistic environment is characterized by the relationships among dancers/movers, drummers, drums, the studio, the images that come from outside the studio—if there is a window or open door—and the emotions and impressions each person brings to the studio that day. In some cases, Silvestre talks a little about Candomblé and the Orixás before starting the experience. She calls attention to the fact that there is a forest, a river, other elements of nature, or a memory of these natural elements within each one of us;

the idea in that experience is to draw out those memories, to express them. Other times she offers information while moving, literally, describing the meanings behind the movements and symbols participants experience in pass through.

2) Meeting in the circle

After the initial connections, participants meet in a circle, "the magical space; space where we are all included" (Silvestre 2018). Silvestre explores the circle as a magic space where students are guided through a spontaneous sequence of movement that borrows from the fundamentals of Silvestre Technique, but which are not as structured. It is in the circle where Silvestre begins to introduce students to the symbology of the Orixás using the *Avania* rhythm to open the way for the work with specific Orixás that will come next. In Candomblé, the *Avania* rhythm opens the *Xirê* ceremony while practitioners enter the public space, forming the circle where they will honor and greet all the Orixás by singing and dancing to each of them in a pre-established order. The movement vocabulary is defined but the combination or sequence varies according to Silvestre's guidance. This is a moment of storytelling, especially in relation to the general symbology used in Candomblé: the closed hands placed one over the other, positioned in front of the chest with elbows bent, refer to one's balance; the steps to the sides, alternating directions while scooping both hands through the air, traveling forward, backward, and sideways, refer to the opening of a space for those who will come in the future, after you.

3) Displacements and storytelling

This moment is marked by the division of the group into "families" of four or five individuals who move in a straight line or diagonal experiencing the sequence of movements that are gradually built up while traveling forward. After reaching the edge of the dance floor, the dancers/movers move off to the right or left and double back along the pathways surrounding the dance space to return to their starting position—thus retaining the sense of a circle. During this time, Silvestre proposes experiments with simple gestures from which the dancer/mover draws inspiration to improvise around those gestures and the myth and characteristics of a given Orixá; she also engages with complex sequences of movements that tell long stories about a specific Orixá. At her 2018 University of Texas workshop, for example, she offered movements that included two fingers pointing up and down dynamically, laughter, and looking intently at the other dancers/movers, inviting everyone to freely play with the trickster character and stories of Exu. In contrast, she also worked with the longer predetermined sequences of movements for Ogum in which the Orixá's gesturality and movements explored the idea of opening up a path as dancers/movers transformed their arms into swords, slicing through the air as if fighting in a battle. In Silvestre's classes, there are infinite possibilities of mixing these approaches to the Orixás. While telling Oxossi's stories of hunting, Silvestre creates improvised interludes in the middle of a long sequence; for example, actions that mimic retrieving an arrow from an imaginary quiver, fitting the arrow in the bowstring, approaching the prey, releasing the arrow, and mounting a horse to ride away.

Silvestre Technique

During the Silvestre Technique Intensive Program in Salvador, there are usually two groups (group 1 and group 2) divided according to the students' previous experience with dance and their ability to navigate through what Silvestre calls the "conversations" of Silvestre Technique with pleasure and also a certain degree of challenge. The student is the one who indicates the level he/she wants to engage with. If any adjustment is necessary, the instructor talks to the student and together they find the best option for that experience. In Silvestre Technique there is also room for adaptation and change according to each class, but classes are often organized into three moments, which I have named as follows:

1) *Concentrating and opening the channels of communication*

> *My great-grandfather, before he left the house to go fish, he had this moment of concentration. I used to ask him: 'great-grandpa, why you are stopped there?' And he used to say: 'I am preparing myself to go to the sea and come back.' I remembered his words and his custom, then I realized I needed a moment like that [before my dancing] and I included it in the class. (Silvestre)*

Inspired by her great-grandfather, Silvestre creates a moment to prepare internally to enter a transformative process of body training, a process that envisions physical, intellectual, and spiritual engagement. The beginning of every class involves an moment for participants to close their eyes, breathe, and feel or activate the internal eyes of perception or visualization. While encouraging students/dancers/participants to connect with the self, Silvestre also calls their attention to the necessity of awakening their bodies to communicate with the voices they can hear only when open and attentive to who they are and what they brought into the room that day. They open their senses to the voices of

their ancestors, the voices of the "universe," and the voices of nature. Participants are instructed to close their eyes and use their hands to activate channels or the chakras with the heat they bring when they are close to the face, chest, belly, or other parts of the body.

After the initial concentration and contact with the "self", participants/students open their eyes (and channels) and walk around the space to begin making contact with each other, the musicians, the drums, and the space surrounding their bodies. Silvestre invites them to appreciate those encounters and prepare for a collaboration.

2) Initial conversations: building the foundations

The opening "conversations" in Silvestre Technique, as Silvestre herself asserts, are not "warm-up sequences"; they involve the full engagement of the body, although emphasis is placed on the grounding and activation of natural elements through movement. Repetition is a premise that is embraced at this moment. The re-created symbology or the symbology as it is embodied for technical development is highlighted at this point. The basis of her technique comes to light in the initial "conversations." The particular work with angles and lines of the arms and legs are evident in this part of the class, and the work with stretching and strengthening, balance, coordination, and focus is linked to the introduction of symbols that are borrowed but transformed from Candomblé. This is the moment of introduction to the symbols and movements related to each element of nature that she works with. Earth, water, fire, and air are activated in each student's body and the training becomes an opportunity to understand how these elements are expressed through their moving-bodies. For those who are more familiar with Orixá dance, it is possible to identify a few elements from specific Orixás here and

there, but for a general audience, the perception is that there is a "flavor of the Orixá" (Jones 2018).

3) Complex dialogues: choreographic sequences and displacement

This is the challenging moment of the class in which the instructor usually formulates a more complex combination of movements, working with jumps, turns, rolls, and significant movement through space and across the floor. Air is the main element explored in this moment. Creativity and freedom to use the structure offered by the instructor allows dancers/movers to engage in a dance in which they express their identity and communicate messages as they flourish naturally. The sensation of autonomy in movement emerges as a consequence of all the encouragement and work put forth in the previous two moments of the class.

Part II

Edileusa Santos's Dance of Black Expression: *corpo/tambor* and *tambor/corpo* (body/drum and drum/body) as decentering notions of the "black dancing body"

> *Bare feet in solid contact with the earth; the ground as a medium to caress, stomp, or to make contact with the whole body (whether with serpentine, supplicatory, or somersaulting movements); a grounded, "get-down" quality to the movement characterized by body asymmetry (knees bent, torso slightly pitched forward so that in its quintessence, the dancing body looks like Yale art historian Robert Farris Thompson's concept of "African Art in Motion"); an overall polyphonic feel to the dance/dancing body (encompassing a democratic equality of body parts, with the center of energy, focus, and gravity shifting through different body parts—polycentric; as well as different body parts moving to two or more meters or rhythms—polymetric and polyrhythmic); articulation of the separate units of the torso (pelvis, chest, rib cage, buttocks); and a primary value placed on both individual and group improvisation: All these are elements drawn from the Africanist aesthetic and perspective.*
>
> - Brenda Dixon Gottschild -

In 2003, Brenda Dixon Gottschild published the third book of a remarkable series around Africanist influence in American contemporary dance and on the American black dance, *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool,* in which she provides an important discussion about the history of the "black dancing body" in the U.S. as central in the culture. In considering the testimony of contemporary dancers and choreographers, Gottschild encourages reflections on how race and color is not an easy topic among dancers and engenders controversy expanding the ways a black dancing body can be understood in the Americas. Gottschild highlights her interest in giving emphasis to what she calls black dance and the black dancing body, not as a way to create marks and categorize it, but as a response to the way European-based dance and white dancing bodies became normative in empirical and theoretical productions. In order to avoid invisibility of black dances and dancers' fundamental participation in the formation of American culture, Gottschild offers a re-mapping of this dance geography by revealing how the black dancing body is at the center of the development of U.S. concert dance.

As is worth noticing in the quotation above, the body in motion is the focus of Gottschild's reflections. Because she questions stereotypes that tend to narrow understandings of the black dancing body, the physical body is central to her approach. Rather than limiting the notions of the black dancing body with specific characteristics and images of skin/hair, feet, or buttocks, and even when discussing the soul and spirit, Gottschild shows the infinite possibilities related to these multiple bodies, including a vision of these bodies as entities that "can take us to otherworldly realms" (15).

However, Gottschild does not invest in discussions around the black dancing body in relation to other elements that, according to Edileusa Santos, are foundational in the process of investigating how a dancing body reconnects to its African heritage in the Americas. Santos argues that on the dance floor, where a "dance of black expression" is taught, the presence of the drums is fundamental. Indeed, Santos decenters the gaze that looks at an African-based dance training by transferring her attention from the black dancing body to the relationship between the black dancing body and drumming; and between the dancing body and the drums themselves. Santos dives deep into this relationship, taking as reference the corporeal aspect of a call-response mode of behavior while composing the dance and music in the *terreiro*. In other words, Santos explores the mutual creation of and intrinsic link between rhythm and movement, dancing and drumming, and dancer and drummer for black dance and African-based dance expression.

By decentering her focus on the space in between the black dancing body and the drummer-drum unity, Santos brings to light a link that emerges from this relationship, which is the link to one's memories in the context of his or her ancestry. In Santos's words,

> The first source of my research was my experience as a student at the Duque de Caxias Elementary School, in the Liberdade neighborhood of Salvador, Bahia state, performing as a student-dancer with the folkloric group Exaltacão à Bahia, where I had my first contact with the drum outside of the Afro-religious context (Candomblé). From that approximation, I noticed something that called my attention, whether it is the way the drummer plays the drum in a black dance class, or the way the drummer expresses emotions and sensations that exist in our

> personal and collective memory, and how this reverberation occurs in the context of our ancestry.[128] (Santos E. 48)

Santos's reference to the drummer-drum as a facilitator of personal access to memories and ancestry in the context of concert dance coincides with Luiz Antonio Simas's and Luiz Rufino's understanding of the importance of the black body–drum relationship in a religious context. Simas and Rufino discuss the survival or reinvention of African culture in the Americas during and after enslavement. According to the authors "the whip that hits the loin [body] and the drumstick that hits the drum's leather are two sides of the same coin" (58). By asserting this, the authors argue that concomitant to the experience of suffering, humiliation, and violent removal from their land, people, language, and culture, enslaved Africans in the Americas discovered ways and developed strategies to maintain, reinvent, and reconnect to their land, people, culture, traditions, languages, and histories through the ritual drum. The authors state:

> If the whip is the scream of death, the drum is the discourse of life. They, the ritual drums, hold their own grammars: they tell stories, talk to women, men, and children, model behavior and expand the world's horizons. They were the ones that many times expressed what the word could not say and told stories that books could not tell and that languages could not express. The drummers of ritual drums, typically prepared for this role since childhood, are literate in the drumming alphabet to learn the appropriate rhythm for each Orixá, *vodum* or *inquice*. There is, therefore, a drum pedagogy, made from the silence of the

[128] "A primeira fonte da pesquisa foi a minha vivência como aluna do Colégio Duque de Caxias, no bairro da Liberdade, em Salvador-BA, atuando como estudante-dançarina no grupo Folclórico Exaltação à Bahia, do referido colégio, onde tive o primeiro contato com o tambor fora do universe afro-religioso (Candomblé). A partir dessa aproximação, percebi algo que me chamou atenção, seja a maneira como o músico percussionista percute o Tambor, em aula de dança negra, seja como expressa emoções e sensações existentes em nossa memória pessoal e coletiva, e como, essa repercussão ocorre no âmbito da nossa ancestralidade" (Santos E. 48).

> speeches and from the bodies' responses, and anchored in the ways of reading the world suggested by the primordial myths.[129] (Simas and Rufino 58)

In the quotation above, Simas and Rufino are referring to the experience within the Afro-religious context in which Santos substantiates her methodology. This drum pedagogy—born from messages that are not expressed through words and responses evoked through body movement—is evident in Santos's proposal. In her "Dance of Black Expression" classes, Santos invites drummers-drums and dancers/movers to engage in this kind of dialogue, one which reconnects people with their histories and selves.

When re-imagining this relationship in a concert-dance context, Santos suggests that "the drum's sound emerges in the [dancer's] body, encouraging the vibrations and sensations; it suggests new possibilities, corporeal experiences, and new attitudes, especially a new way of organization, a new harmony, a new Drum/Body identity"[130] (53). The *corpo/tambor*, or body/drum, born from the interaction between the drum, the sound made by the drum, and the dancer, relies on the presence of another active body: the drummer's body, which actually produces the drum's sounds. Santos also conceptualizes the *tambor/corpo* or drum/body unity, which refers to the interdependent relationship between the drummer and the drum (55). Santos's perspective of

[129] "Se a chibata é grito de morte, o tambor é discurso de vida. Eles, os tambores rituais, possuem gramáticas próprias: contam histórias, conversam com as mulheres, homens e crianças, modelam condutas e ampliam os horizontes do mundo. Foram eles que muitas vezes expressaram o que a palavra não podia dizer e contaram as histórias que os livros não poderiam contar e as línguas não poderiam exprimir. Os tocadores dos tambores rituais, normalmente preparados para essa função desde crianças, são alfabetizados nos alfabetos da percussão para aprender o toque adequado para cada orixá, vodum ou inquice. Há, portanto, uma pedagogia do tambor, feita dos silêncios das falas e da resposta dos corpos e fundamentada nas maneiras de ler o mundo sugeridas pelos mitos primordiais." (Simas and Rufino 58).

[130] "O som do tambor emerge no corpo, estimula as vibrações e as sensações; propõe novas possibilidades, vivências corporais e novas atitudes, sobretudo uma nova maneira de organização, uma nova harmonia, uma nova identidade Corpo/Tambor" (Santos E. 53).

corpo/tambor versus *tambor/corpo* facilitates a close and deep relationship between the three elements of drummer-drum-dancer, avoiding the perception of the *tambor/corpo* only as a disembodied sound.

In this regard, I argue that through this methodology, Santos proposes a triangulation between the drummer, whom she identifies as the protagonist in this relationship (with the dancer); the drum, which is the instrument and the material body that produces, emits, or gives off the sounds that evoke movement; and the dancer/mover, who communicates simultaneously with the drummer and the drum responding to the presence of both. The dancer/mover is also the one who keeps the dialogue alive, because she/he serves as a reference and stimulus for the drummer's composition or creation. Below, I propose a visual representation of this triangulation.

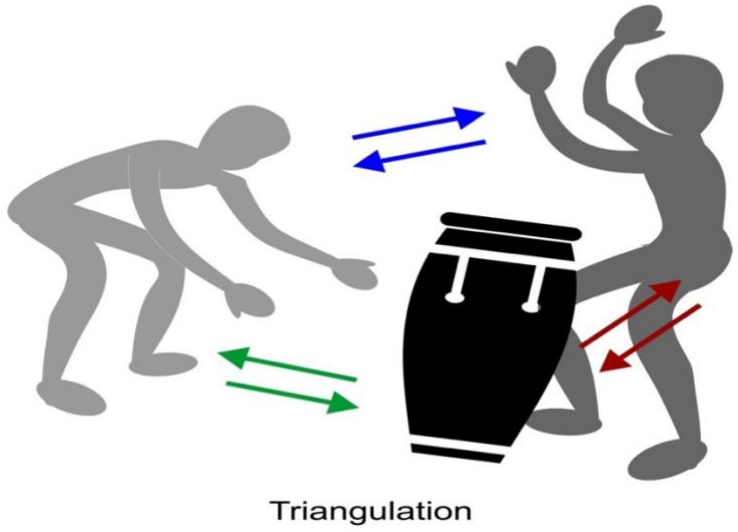

Figure 8: Triangulation

In addition to Santos bringing to light two entities, the *corpo/tambor* and the *tambor/corpo*, I read the *tambor*, or drum, as an entity that holds its own space in this relationship. When observing the figure 8, it is important to note that the drummer occupies a central position because she/he is close to the drum; the drum relates to the dancer indirectly through the sounds it emits, but this relationship relies on the drummer. Santos is emphatic in reminding the dancers that "the drum has a protagonist. There is an energy. I have to look at this person. I have to dialogue with this person and the drum" (Santos). Instead of reinforcing a general trend of considering the music and sound in a dance class as an impersonal element, she wants to highlight the person-to-person, artist-to-artist, and creator-to-creator relationship. The dashed line in the drawing refers to a secondary way of relating in this triangular structure; it refers to the sound that leaves the drum and drives the dancer's movements. The protagonist relates simultaneously to the dancer and the drum. As in Candomblé, although the drums are directly related to the *ogãs* and *alabês*, the *atabaques* by themselves are entities. That is why I leave them as evidence of a third element in the relationship. By thinking about the drummer and drum as a union Santos choses to illuminate this relationship as holistic and interdependent, borrowing from the cosmology of Candomblé. In order to contemplate this aspect of Candomblé cosmology in my visual offering, I envision a spiral overlapping the triangulation, as I illustrate below.

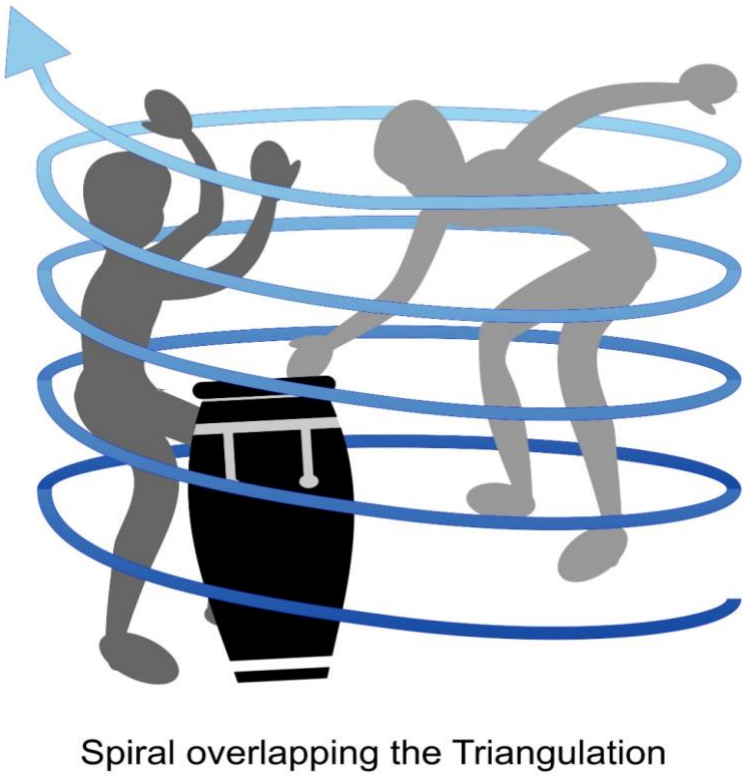

Figure 9: Spiral Overlapping the Triangulation

Since her awakening to the drummer-drum unity, Santos has been nourished by the drummer's behavior which, as she describes, offers elements for her imagination to allow memories to emerge. Santos was attentive to "the way the drummer's body behaves in relation to the drum, to the gestures, the movement, the body of the dancer who moves through the space according to the rhythm promoted by the instrument"[131] (48). She looks at the drummer's posture, face, breath, and the way her/his hands touch the instrument

[131] "[…] como o corpo desse músico comporta-se ante o Tambor, diante do gesto, do movimento, do corpo do praticante, percorrendo o espaço a partir do ritmo proporcionado pelo instrumento" (Santos E. 48).

differently depending on her/his perceptions, intentions, and feelings. She often describes how the drummers' hands delicately sliding across the leather drum head often suggest, in her imagination, someone caressing a baby's face. In other cases, the agility, precision, and syncopated movement of the percussion remind her of the galloping legs of Oxossi's horse.

Santos evokes a "look" at the drummers' behavior that involves a different way of perceiving it, that is, by using the five senses. Not only is it about watching the behavior of the drummer's body and listening to the drums during the music composition; it is also about being touched by the sound, smelling it, and tasting it. In this regard, she proposes an experience that involves one's full engagement. Santos uses the expression "to perceive the drum" as a way of expanding understanding of the "listening to the drum" by using the five senses. According to her, "because it [the perception of the drum through the five senses] is new, it causes a feeling of strangeness, but it is this strangeness that opens up space for a new corporeal experience, almost always thought-provoking, and in this way favoring an intimacy between the body and the drum"[132] (54). Although the idea of actually tasting a sound or even smelling it is metaphorical, Santos advocates for a corporeal attention that transcends the limits of the visual and aural. In Fred Moten's book *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition,* the author questions both the dominance of the aural in relation to music and of the visual in relation to photography by talking about a visible music and challenging "not only the

[132] "[…], por ser novo, causa extranhamento, mas esse mesmo estranhamento vai dando espaço a uma nova vivência corporal, quase sempre instigante, favorecendo, assim, uma intimidade entre o corpo e o Tambor" (Santos E. 54).

ocularcentrism that generally—perhaps necessarily—shapes theories of the nature of photography and our experience of photography but that mode of semiotic objectification and inquiry that privileges the analytic-interpretive reduction of phonic materiality and/or nonmeaning over something like a mimetic improvisation of and with that materiality that moves in excess of meaning" (197). Dance is particularly linked to the gaze and, like photography, has often been analyzed through the lens of semiotics, which reduces the expressive existence of movement.

If on the one hand Santos emphasizes the need for the dancer/mover to acknowledge the drummer's presence as a protagonist, on the other hand she observes the importance of the dancer/mover's moving body in response to the drummers' composition. She proposes a mutual and interconnected relationship. Bira Monteiro and Eduardo Oliveira, musicians who have worked with Santos closely since she began to develop this methodology, observe that the dancers' moving bodies serve as "sheet music" for their playing and composition.[133] In other words, they create the sounds and rhythms based on what they receive from the dancer/mover; it is actually a concomitant composition.

Alongside the focus on the relationship of *corpo/tambor* versus *tambor/corpo* and the way of perceiving it through the five senses, Santos's Dance of Black Expression follows a third premise, which consists of exploring the independence and interconnectedness between parts of the body and their association with the Orixás.

[133] This statement was made by Bira Monteiro and Eduardo Santos, musicians who work with Santos. (Santos E. 48)

According to Santos, the body is trained to acknowledge its ability to move by exploring simultaneously multiple rhythms. Different parts of the body follow distinct instruments and rhythms at the same time. Like in Candomblé, Santos's "Dance of Black Expression" class ideally has three drummers and three drums present; drummer-drum number 1 is the soloist who creates variations that conduct and inspire dancers/movers' movements; drummer-drum number 2 maintains a rhythmic basis or "groove"; drummer-drum number 3 maintains the rhythm but also creates additional effects or "accents" that help create an ambience (Santos 49). As one such example, the polyrhythm of the body parts allows the dancer to move the shoulders according to drummer-drum 2, while the hips follow the beat of drummer-drum number 1 and the hands sporadically move, highlighting the accents created by drummer-drum 3. In Candomblé, the legs or lower part of the body often follow the rhythm marked by drummer-drum 2, and the torso and arms tell the stories of the Orixás through gestures and movements, creating nuances or following the accents and "calls" of drummers-drum 1. With the ability to explore these polyrhythmic ariations, the dancers/movers create polydynamism in their dancing.

Improvisation: A space for investigation of multiple alternative languages

Unlike most dance instructors who work with improvisation, in her teaching of Dance of Black Expression Santos does not provide a movement structure or gestural vocabulary for dancer/movers to improvise around that. Indeed, the improvisation is anchored in the *corpo/tambor* versus *tambor/corpo* relationship; the relationship serves as the main structure. Santos encourages both drummers and dancer/movers to investigate a

particular vocabulary that could emerge from each relationship. Her intention is to encourage them to cross the threshold of known rhythms and movement combinations in order to discover new possibilities of expressing themselves through dancing.

In "Queering the Jazz Aesthetic: An Interview with Sharon Bridgforth and Omi Osun Joni Jones" (Royster), Omi Osun Joni Jones describes, based on her experience with theatrical jazz, the value of reaching the level of improvisation that I identify as the level Santos aims to reach in her methodology. As Jones observes, improvisation offers an opportunity for a person to "be right here, with [her/his] body, and [hers/his] history, and [her/his] truth, and let all of that come forward" (547). Jones offers a comment that seems personal but indeed it describes precisely the experience of improvising with "permissiveness," or allowing the process to be true and full.

> Ooh! I can't tell you how hard that is to do! And when I think when we hit it, there's a way that it can seize us, and we just—it's almost like a joyous madness. Just to be inside and to be able to play in abandon. Without thinking "Oh, that looks silly." Without using filters all the time. And it doesn't mean abandoning training. So you know, you still, your training tells what it means to move in space. Your training tells you how to use your voice. You don't abandon that. But you don't let that training eclipse the spontaneity of the instinct in the moment. So the thing of being present is really a foundation to the work. (547)

While clarifying the importance of bringing a fully engaged presence to improvisational practice, Jones evokes a reflection not only on the dynamic balance between training skills and spontaneity necessary to let the new emerge, but also on the implicit courage required for a person to take risks and allow the unknown to bloom.

In Santos's Dance of Black Expression dancers/movers have the opportunity to discover and develop their own languages, although it takes some time for them to go through and beyond languages they are already familiar with. Dancer/movers search for and create a new grammar with a vocabulary that is flexible but always an expression of their self. The tension between the stability found within "the known" and the instability or uncertainties of the "unknown" engenders what Jones describes as hard to do but simultaneously freeing. Gottschild uses words of Jann Whitehead that highlight the importance of discovering and developing self-languages. Whitehead says:

> Language is always more powerful than it seems in life. It expresses our view of ourselves, but it also constitutes that view. We can only talk about ourselves in the language we have available. If that language is rich, it illuminates us. But if it is narrow or restricted, it represses and conceals us. If we do not have language that describes what we believe ourselves to be or what we want to be, we risk being defined in someone else's terms." (Jaan Whitehead in Gottschild "The Black Dancing Body" 19)

Given the history of the hegemony of Euro-American-based dance techniques and movement vocabulary in spaces marked by colonialism, the work to create black subjects' own languages is fundamental in the path toward action and accomplishments. As Fred Moten and Jones understands, improvisation is a space for black subjects to find freedom. "I've often felt we've had to improvise because we were not the rule-makers and the rules could change at whim. So we had to be able to spin on a dime, we had to be able to improvise in order to survive and thrive" (Jones in Royster 544).

Santos's methodology provides a space for black subjects to search for their own dance language and express it in a way I had not observed in other black dance practices

in Salvador. Her proposal of a deep investigation through improvisation is unique and holds a creative potential that cannot be measured. While it is possible to notice a trend of developing methodologies that bear the unique features of each dance instructor and characterize multiple ways of making black dance in Salvador, in black dance classes in general, dancer/movers do not have much autonomy in terms of creating a movement vocabulary, at least not to the same extent that they do with in Santos's methodology. As I mentioned before, improvisation in Santos's work not only runs through the class at specific moments, it is also the foundation of the practice.

This methodology has been developed over the last almost twenty years. As Marilza Oliveira asserts, Santos has been rediscovering and reinventing her practice as an educator and artist. "This is an incredible example because she moves forward with her ancestry but she moves through time without making accommodations like various professionals of Afro-Brazilian dance who have taught the same class for twenty years"[134] (Oliveira M.). Santos challenged herself to embrace an aspect of her class that was always valued but not viewed as central, the relation between dance and music—dancer/mover and drum-drummers. As Santos describes in an interview, it was in 2000 that she began to develop this methodology after she noticed that her teaching was in a comfortable space: "I needed more."

This search for "more" and encouragement of other dancers/movers to create personal movement languages by discovering a dance vocabulary anchored in the

[134] "E isso também é um exemplo incrível porque ela vai com a ancestralidade dela mas ela atravessa o tempo, ela não se acomoda como vários profissionais da dança afro que tem a mesma aula ha mais de vinte anos." (Oliveira M.)

moving-body-self open space, to use creativity and break the black women's silences that Audre Lorde suggests in her work. In "Poetry is not a Luxury," Lorde contends that art and creativity are fundamental for the feminine experience in the African diaspora by asserting: "For women, then, poetry is not luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence" (37). Vital because it brings the artist closer to the people who have access to this art, to herself as a human being making them stronger and more real. As a language, the art is also a strategy to break silences, as Lorde argues. "Lorde reclaimed and transformed overlapping, discredited, and marginalized identities—black, lesbian, feminist—into a powerful, radical, and progressive standpoint" (Byrd 5). The artistic language facilitates the expression of ideas, feelings, and a deep self, which empowers women to confront the "pushes" of everyday life.

Like poetry, dance also empowers women in the African diaspora. As Yvonne Daniel ("African Diaspora Dance") asserts, both popular and theatrical dance promote a sense of equilibrium, fullness and collective solidarity. In her words, "dance is spirit giving and essential excitation; it is a meaningful resource for African and African-derived people" (348). According to Daniel, through dance the individual can access an ancestral memory that brings her/him closer to her/his own history. In Santos's dance methodology improvisation is the main strategy for the activation of creativity and connection with a collective, the self, and the subject's ancestral memory, which can therefore empower her/him.

It is in the relationship between the Dance of Black Expression and an aspect observed in Sharon Bridgforth's Theatrical Jazz, Lorde's poetry, and Daniel's

understanding of African diaspora dance as a link between the individual and her/his ancestral memory that I identify Santos's practice as freeing and empowering, especially when I refer to black women. If on the one hand Santos reinforces an Africanist vision while advocating for a return to the foundational African-derived relationship with the drums and drummer, on the other hand she opens space for a diasporic perspective and dancing by encouraging dancer/movers coming from and being in different places to actually become the protagonists of her classes. The movement language that emerges through her methodology is diasporic in the sense that it is created by each participant with her/his own ancestral memories and histories.

Teaching the traditional: Santos and her own way of approaching the Orixás in her teaching of Afro-Brazilian dance

Despite the fact that Santos challenged herself to invest in a new methodology and proposal for body training, her teaching was always distinctive. "She did not let herself be seduced by the mass of professionals that did everything the same"[135] (Oliveira M.). The method she calls traditional was far from being acknowledged as part of a common trend in the field of dance in Bahia and Brazil. Santos had her own way of approaching the dances, gesturality, and mythology of the Orixás. The training exercises often involve the gestures that tell stories, transforming physical effort into a pleasurable experience. Fátima Carvalho describes the abdominal exercise by saying:

[135] "Ela não se deixou seduzir por essa massa de profissionais que fazia tudo igual." (Oliveira M.)

> Edileusa Santos genuinely preserves the influence of this African-based culture in her movement which is inspired, I believe, by Orixá dance. Something I practiced a lot were the abdominal exercises, so beautiful! Imagine doing abdominals as if you were throwing water on yourself. I fell in love with Santos's movements and the preservation [of this content].[136] (Carvalho)

The sequence of movements Carvalho describes is a reference to Oxum. During training, the imagination takes the dancer/mover to the river and the energy of the water. This exercise usually evolves in the following way. Seated on the floor with legs extended straight out, the dancer starts to gather water from the space beside the feet and legs, cupping her hands in the shape of seashells, repeatedly bringing up water from the floor to the knees, the thighs, the belly, and the chest while the torso bends over to allow the hands to move in the direction of those body parts. When the inclined torso is nearly touching the floor, the dancer/mover suddenly lifts upward, as if to throw water to the sky, returning to her initial position.

What Santos believes is traditional is first, the following of a typical class structure that encompasses a warm-up and develops into exercises through which the dancer/mover works with stretching, flexibility, resistance, displacement, and more complex sequences of movement at the end of the class; second, the traditional involves a connection with Candomblé traditions and movements drawn from that context. The training never overlaps the imaginary with the Orixá archetype. "This traditional preparation in which the dancer holds a leg moves from an initial position with closed

[136] Originally in Portuguese. My translation.

legs to a position with opened legs, the dancer does a movement known as *gicar/jiká*[137] with shoulders while stretching legs" (Santos). In fact, her classes use floor work, standing and balance exercises, and displacement exercises while exploring elements and characteristics related to the Orixás and other Candomblé rituals.

Another interesting and unique approach Santos employs in her class brings together movements drawn from Afro-Brazilian popular dances with the movement nuances observed in certain Orixás. In one of the few classes I participated in during my fieldwork, Santos explored three basic movements borrowed from *afoxé*, a secular manifestation of Candomblé that uses the rhythm of *ijexá* (often played for the Orixá Oxum). In the first movement sequence, the hands are closed in fists and elbows are bent at a ninety-degree angle, the torso bent forward slightly, the right leg opens out to the side, transferring of the weight of the body on softly bent knees, and then closes to repeat the movement on the left side. In the second movement, the dancer's fists are resting one on top of the other, the elbows are once again bent at a ninety-degree angle, and the torso is inclined slightly forward while the legs move forward in a slow walk marked by bent knees. In the third exercise, the arms and torso are positioned as in the first sequence, while the right leg steps forward before shifting the dancer's weight to the back leg and forward again on the half-beat in a kind of step ball-change movement, then repeating the movement on the opposite side. After going through the three movements, Santos encourages dancers to navigate through them, freely combining these movements. Next,

[137] *Gicar* is a traditional movement performed in Candomblé and Afro-Brazilian dance classes that consist in the fast, short and continuous movement of shoulders' trembling.

she asks them to perform the movements embracing the energy of a given Orixá while create distinct nuances during this execution. The energy of Oxum is often already engaged during the performance of these movements because their foundation and the associated rhythm come from Oxum's sacred dancing. The challenge is to play with these movements by performing them with the energy of a different Orixá, such as Ogum, whose movements are precise, strong, direct, and fast.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter offers a detailed analysis of Silvestre's and Santos's methodologies. I open the chapter by describing Candomblé *terreiro* corporealities and its specificities in order to reveal the significance of that space as a reference for bodily behavior, gesturality, and movement symbology that inform the works of Silvestre and Santos. In Part I, by examining diagrams and analyzing the movement addressed in Silvestre Technique and Symbology of the Orixás, I reveal how the alternative language that Silvestre proposes is anchored in Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous elements. In contrast, I also demonstrate that this fundamental connection to African-derived dances and people enables a transnational outreach. Silvestre's engagement with notions of universe and universal engenders a discussion around her offering of Afro-Brazilian as universal. In Part II, I look at Santos's Dance of Black Expression in relation to Gottschild's notion of the black dancing body and the decentering of this gaze from the body to the body-drum-drummer relationship, a triangulation I identify in Santos's methodology. The understanding of the spiritual as political, the importance of the work of those who came

before them, shared work, and improvisation are some of the aspects observed in these dancer-choreographer-educators' practices that align with black feminisms and queer initiatives. This connection serves to enrich the contributions of Silvestre and Santos to creating alternatives for women's actions within the African diaspora dance field.

Chapter 4: Choreographing Brazil: Moving in Alternative Directions

PROLOGUE

Rosangela Silvestre and Edileusa Santos as well as most of the dancers in the companies they had choreographed in Brazil – Odundê, Dance Brazil, Balê Folclórico da Bahia, and the Mulheres do Asé's performers – identify as black. Although they experienced similar trajectories in the dance field as choreographers, Santos and Silvestre developed completely different choreographic styles over the course of their careers. Both took their first steps toward the practice of creation with the group Odundê. The process of researching, conducting ethnographic work, and proposing movement sequences by negotiating with the group during collective compositions prepared them to open dialogues when they started to dive into their individual processes of choreographing. Moreover, both Santos and Silvestre had Dance Brazil as the first company and New York as the first stage for their choreographies. Both had taught in Salvador, Bahia, and it was the acknowledgement of the high quality of their works as Afro-Brazilian-based dance instructors that facilitated the opening of a door toward international choreographic creation. Each dancer-choreographer-educator prioritized different aspects in their careers, which in turn had an impact on the choreographies they created and their current practices.

By looking at several pieces choreographed individually by Santos and Silvestre throughout their careers with performances in Salvador and the U.S., in this chapter I

critically analyze their works by arguing that each phase of their trajectory had a significant influence and left its imprint in the field of dance. In Dance Brazil, Silvestre worked during a transition period in which the company was evolving from a period in which choreographers were exploring the traditional, celebrating Brazilian culture and popular dance forms, to a time in which the company began to explore themes that looked at socio-political issues specific to Brazil's reality, in addition to the aforementioned cultural celebrations. *Tenda dos Milagres* (1992) represents Silvestre's first unique choreographic intervention while choreographing for Dance Brazil. If on the one hand Silvestre inaugurates an engagement with socio-political issues in the company with this piece, on the other hand she still makes use of Brazilian popular dances. Despite the importance of this piece in her career, neither Silvestre nor Jelon Vieira have a video recording of this choreography in their archives.[138] My analysis here is based on dance reviews and excerpt of the piece.

Santos, who started performing with Dance Brazil as a dancer in 1993—the year after Silvestre's choreography—participated in this display of Brazilian socio-political context through choreography, and when she herself became choreographer, she contributed to a new direction in the company's aesthetics, expressed by blurring the divisions between *capoeiristas* and dancers, and between traditional dance forms and capoeira in the company's work. *Serra Pelada* (1998) is one example of this aesthetic

[138] The only video recording copy of this piece I could identify is at the New York Public Library but I could not access it due to the geographical distance and the difficulty I had in contacting two copyright holders to get permission to digitize it.

change, as a piece that paved the way for many other works that came after the director of the company, Jelon Vieira, finally assumed the role of choreographer and consolidated this trend. *Quilombos* (1996), *Camará* (1998), and *Ginga* (2000) were also choreographies I observed in relation to *Serra Pelada*. This piece encourages a discussion around the representation of black Brazilian women in the U.S. and subtly touches on a reflection about sexuality. My analysis here brings up the knowledge of a dancer who participated in the process of creation and performances of the aforementioned pieces.

Brazilian women have been generally hypersexualized in Brazilian and U.S. popular culture. As Benjamin Legg asserts in "The Bicultural Sex Symbol: Sônia Braga in Brazilian and North American Popular Culture," there is a sensuality that U.S. subjects read as "inherent to Brazil, the tropics, and Latinas" (205). By examining Sonia Braga's success as a sex symbol in the U.S., Legg observes that in relating her sexual freedom to her Brazilianness, there is an implication in the popular imagination that "in Brazil things are done in a more sexually liberated way" (206). On the other hand, the author also observes that her individuality has to be taken into consideration to allow an understanding of how she reinforces and helps deconstruct Hollywood stereotypes of Latinas (206) and to leave space for other possibilities related to Brazilian women. Legg calls attention to stereotypes around "Brazilians' innate sexuality, both threatening and liberating" (208), and to the particular free association of this stereotype with darker-skinned Brazilians, especially with the fruit of miscegenation: the *mulata*. In national discourses and worldwide, "the idea of sensuality and sexuality and the miscegenation that both leads to and stems from them have served to differentiate Brazilians from other

peoples and give Brazilians a concrete international identity" (210). In this sense, Braga fits U.S. views of what a Latin woman should look like. In relation to dance, although there are Brazilian dance companies that have penetrated the international route with works that emphasize popular dances from Bahia and Brazilian contemporary dance such as Dance Brazil, Balé Folclórico da Bahia, and Grupo Corpo, there is also an international market for groups that position the dancing *mulata* and the black/latin@ female body at the forefront of their presentations of Brazil. Moreover, it is necessary to consider that even when the choreography does not hold a sexual appeal, the presence of the black female body on stage performing a sort of "ephebism," (Gottschild 10) beauty, and power can be simultaneously implicating in a vulnerability.

Given the history of representing Brazilian women as exotic and sensual on international stages, I observe that although neither Santos nor Silvestre explores the image of the *mulata* or women's subjection, or even the display of women's body in their choreography (there is an exception in Silvestre's *Afixirê* that will be discussed later in this chapter), they played with the emphasis on black Brazilian women's beauty, charm, and "smiling" in certain scenes. This simple "smiling" performance can indirectly reinforce what Alexander describes as part of the politics of "serviceability" (Alexander 57)[139] in the tourist industry. I would say this is part of internationalist politics and the

[139] Alexander describes the concept of serviceability while explaining "Hemingway's discovery of Bimini" that "occupies an important place in American literary imagination, and in the imagination of Bahamian state managers as well." According to Alexander, "It was there that he perfected the practice of having black people anticipate the desires of white people, even before whites gave voice to them. It was in Bimini, then, that he developed the trope of serviceability of black people." (57)

way the image of exotic, sensual, and "happy" women are there to serve the tourist in different ways, including by satisfying their visual desires.

Part of Silvestre's reputation in international venues is related to the success of her choreographies created in Salvador with the Balé Folclorico da Bahia (BFB). Her three compositions with this company are analyzed here. The repercussion of *Afixirê* (1996) within Salvador's community of dancer-choreographer-instructors and its continuation as part of the company's current repertory serve as a demonstration of the impact it had in Brazil. Moreover, critical review in the *New York Times* indicates its positive reception worldwide, as critiques about the BFB's shows in Lyon, France were also published in the *New York Times*'s dance reviews. A trend that I noted was toward working with themes related to "African (Senegalese and West African) and Brazilian-Indigenous" heritage without direct mention of specific Afro-Brazilian popular and secular movements in Silvestre's works for the BFB, in her choreographies created in the U.S. for Viver Brazil—*Mothers and Sons* (2013), *Avaninha* (2009), *Three Wives of Xangô* (2006), *In Motion* (2010), and *Orixás* (2007)—she made use of all her knowledge of capoeira, samba, and, especially, of Candomblé and the dances and myths of the Orixás. While Silvestre reveals an Africanist perspective with the BFB—that is to say, the first two choreographies she composed were inspired by Senegalese and West African dances, without much attention paid to the way these dance forms had been transformed—her works with Viver Brazil illuminate her diasporic perspective and Afro-Brazilian re-creations of African elements in different spaces of the African diaspora. At that time, Silvestre had already begun her travels around the world. It was not possible to

access records of Silvestre's creations with the Ballet Hispanico Repertory Company, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Company, American Academy of Ballet, Roots of Brazil, Dance Brazil, Viver Brasil, Muntu Dance Theater and the Kendra Kimbrough Dance Company.

Apparently, the presence of modern dance style has intensified in Silvestre's current compositions. Nevertheless, instead of drawing heavily from the determined codification of Horton and Graham techniques, her works now are anchored in Silvestre Technique and its underlying gesturality of Afro-Brazilian Candomblé. Silvestre Technique has provided Silvestre with all the resources she needs to combine teaching and choreographing. As she has mentioned in interviews, the possibility of traveling to create opportunities for the "ones who wish to dance" is what drives her and her actions at present. The choreographies she creates for final performances in festivals and workshops have reflected this passion for the technique in addition to becoming a space for her experimentations and re-creations. It is possible to notice, for instance, that the structure and environment of the experimental choreographies reveals an openness to improvisation and spontaneity onstage.

Santos's permanence in Brazil and her link to the UFBA Dance School contributed to her growth in a national context and to the consolidation of her methodology. On the other hand, a decrease in her choreographic productions was evident. Between 2000 and 2004 there is no record of any production. Only in 2004 did Santos begin to dedicate more time to choreographic productions and proposals in parallel with her teaching—*Caminho do Axé* (2004), *Erês* (2006), *Erês do Museu* (2007),

O Brasileiro Gil (2008), *Que Diabo é Exu* (2011), *Odundê Bambaquerê* (2011), and *Othello o Mouro do Mundo* (2013)[140] —which culminated in the creation and performance of her most recent piece, *Mulheres do Asé* (2016). As the rehearsal director of *Mulheres do Asé*, I witnessed Santos's involvement in and use of a different lens toward her creation. I contend that her identification with and lived experience as an *asé* woman played an important role in the way she was able to translate aspects of that reality through choreography. "My daughter, I know what I have [with me]" (Santos's mother 2016). These words and other ordinary events in the lives of that woman, Santos's mother, gained a place in her creation. The faith in the Orixás, the way the Orixás express themselves in the simple things and in everyday gestures excelled at the "spectacular" beauty and energy of the dances and symbology of the Orixás. While it was common to see representations and re-creations of Orixá dances and Candomblé rituals in the choreographies of black Bahian dance companies since the 1960s until the present moment, as I will detail in the next sections, the subtlety and power of *asé* women's daily practices as represented by Santos was something rarely witnessed by audiences.

[140] Provided information is under Santos' Curriculo Lattes at http://buscatextual.cnpq.br/buscatextual/visualizacv.do?id=K4139110H6&tokenCaptchar=03AOLTBLSDwyyLICaywDyT_h-Y6T1eLNpD0kaa7L80KgMvGZVSqshlD-7pP91uzq5Zfd5Hk0rlcTemWlEGRix2UterLY6h-EFbVpnGOsmuYYdTrI_guYXmSkOmmmbFgmhnc-6MESmX-_Nybgduc8CNxv58emGDL9pzI9Q7jqGmkDfdwo_iK_d9R-QpH-C5f0_bhiZECmOKH7LqhZfAUj_jSYhIYv7AYmN82i3mzGTxDdp4JlNV4Rt7QS1UuLQn5TnZMWwnTgjm7Kb-y4XlKKup5nfySGtkeqSzJUDh0hV8fWUxNsCraDEq7SQL_5pdwTh0VZ15nzAw2TZm9bhGuygccMSk8uCHbW3w7A
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EDILEUSA SANTOS AND *MULHERES DO ASÉ: PERFORMANCE RITUAL* – A WORK TO BE PERCEIVED BY THE FIVE SENSES

In *Mulheres do Asé: Performance Ritual* (2016) Santos demonstrates why she has been acknowledged for "reaching maturity as a choreographer" (Santana). By engaging with sequences of movement that prioritize gestures drawn from everyday life within Candomblé houses (*terreiros*) and executed without much formalism or virtuosity, Santos detaches from the remnants of modern dance style observed in her previous choreographies. The singular gestural-based dancing is one of the treasures of this piece. Furthermore, Santos's maturity is revealed through: 1) the different approach to time; 2) transposition of the division between music/dance or instruments/bodies; 3) the use of choreographic structures and elements that encourage the audience's perception of the piece through the five senses and; 4) the articulation of black women voices who have contributed to the formation of Brazilian society and culture throughout history.

Her narrative positions bodily and verbal testimonies: live, written, and recorded voices of multiple black women in a dynamic equilibrium and resonance on stage. The poetry offered in motion is not only a "revelation, utopic desire to build another world" (Evaristo in Gonçalves 9) in this piece but it also "manifests dissatisfaction with the pre-established order" that hides the fundamental presence and participation of *asé* [women] in the real world. Women's presence in Candomblé as the main leaders or priests have been acknowledged as a fundamental characteristic of this matriarchal religion. In Candomblé gender determines positions within their hierarchy that are in several cases gender-informed – the positions of drummers (Ogãns and Alabês) can only be occupied by men and the ones of the Orixás (Ekejis) can only be occupied by women. By building

a place of reception and support, Santos—in collaboration with Tânia Bispo, Sandra Santana, Fátima Carvalho, Sueli Ramos, Rejane Sousa, Iyá Nla Stella de Oxossi (in memoriam), Iyá Nla Beata de Yemonjá (in memoriam), Ebomi Nice de Iansã, Ebomi Vanda Machado, Makota Valdina (in memorian), Ya Dagan Dinah e as irmãs da Irmandade da Boa Morte, Luciano Bahia, Gilberto Santiago, Alexandre Espinheira, João Victor, Sara Fernandes, and myself[141]—took the audience through a simultaneously pleasurable and intriguing journey that made them leave the theater with thrilling emotions.

> I was captured by the images, sonority, and especially by my story. I saw myself inside there [onstage]. I saw myself there. I saw my mother, my grandmother, my sister. I saw the women of my family passing through that stage. I saw the many other Marilzas that I was. I could perceive a longing for who I was. I don't know how to explain it. It's a longing for my place, because it seems like they took me from my place, and there [in *Mulheres do Asé*] I was, back home. […] It felt like they brought me to my place, and the sensation was so intense that I could not control myself. I completely lost control.[142] (Oliveira M.)

During the performances and afterwards, I could hear and see how the piece had touched audience members emotionally. Warm hugs, shining eyes, tears, smiles, sweating palms, holding hands, and occasionally laughs were some of the reactions I witnessed. The

[141] I worked with the group as rehearsal director and Santos's assistant during the creative process and premiere of the piece. The names are spelled as in the show program (folder) in this paragraph. It is possible to find the following names spelled differently in other parts of the text due to the fact three of the women passed away – so the way to refer to them changes, and the term Egbomi receives the "g" in my tradition, so I prefer to use it this way. Terms as they are here: Iyá Nla Stella de Oxossi (in memoriam), Iyá Nla Beata de Yemonjá (in memoriam), Egbomi Nice de Iansã, Egbomi Vanda Machado, Makota Valdina (in memoriam).

[142] "Eu fui arrebatada pela imagem, pela sonoridade e, principalmente, pela minha estória. Eu me vi ali dentro. Eu me vi ali. Eu vi minha mãe, minha avó, minha irmã. Eu vi as mulheres da minha família passando por ali. E vi as outras tantas Marilzas que eu já fui. Eu consegui perceber uma saudade de que meu fui. Não sei explicar. É uma saudade do meu lugar, porque parece que me tiraram do meu lugar e ali eu estava de volta a minha casa. […] A sensação era de que me levaram para o meu lugar. E a sensação foi tão profunda que eu me descontrolei. Eu fiquei completamente descontrolada." (Oliveira M.)

reactions were different, but there was always an air about them suggesting an emotional involvement. The piece's approach to time embraces a sort of linearity. It tended to follow a mantra-like dynamic that provided audience members with the time to actually delve into those moments and draw their attention and emotions to that place, which could be an indicative of stagnation but indeed it creates an inviting atmosphere. While composing this piece, Santos was not concerned about the urgency of contemporary daily lives and the internal accelerated mode that modern society has embraced. Thus, in *Mulheres do Asé* she does not interrupt the flow of the scene because she imagines the audience could get disturbed, bored, and want to leave. Instead, she allowed the environments to be set up and allowed things to happen. Given the known the dynamic rhythm of scenes in *Serra Pelada* and *Quilombos,* for example, choreographies that embrace a rhythm that keep movement on stage with walks, recurrent displacements of dancers on stage, simultaneous performances of different groups, among other factors that create a rhythm to these choreographies that relates to a contemporary urban life, which works in another direction in Santos's most recent piece.

Yoruba cosmology and Candomblé offer the main elements that are evident in this choreographic narrative. When the audience starts to occupy the theater, the performers are already on stage, posed like statues – mud statues that according to Yoruba mythology become human bodies. Egbomi Nice, through an image projected onto a screen located upstage center, opens the space by greeting each Orixá from the Candomblé pantheon and blessing everyone with her sweet smile and words of *asé*. In Yoruba-based spiritual practices no speech or ritual can start without the greeting the

Orixás, the ancestors, and the eldest. Under diffuse lights and spread out in an irregular semicircle, the performers stand still in poses that suggest gestures and movements used in day-to-day life within a Candomblé *terreiro*. As the house lights gradually darken and Egbomi Nice concludes her opening speech, the focus on the *atabaque* that is standing in center-stage captures audience's attention. Discreetly, the hands of a drummer poses into the *atabaque* and the sound produced by this contact drum-drummer's hands in ways that recall the *paó*—a ritualistic series of claps made by Candomblé practitioners to greet and show the divinities that the body transforms in honor of their energy—creates a thrill around what is to come next. As the drumming develops into a regular but increasingly rapid rhythm in which the drummer seems to challenge his abilities and endurance in relation to the instrument and the power of its sound, the drumming intensity grows, and drummer's body reaches its physical limit until it suddenly stops. The audience breathes.

When the playing restarts, the bodies of the performers onstage finally start to move in irregular order, alternating between movement and pauses as they gradually gain life. In engaging with the Yoruba belief that humans were created as mud statues and received the breath of life or *asé*, the vital force that mobilizes them, Santos provides a different lens to look at the humans' creation.

The drumming serves as the breath of life, and the performers finally move through the space, walking freely toward transparent boxes filled with water placed downstage, marking a semi-circle, to receive the blessing and start positioning themselves in their spots. Dancers aligned shoulder to shoulder face the audience. A drummer holding the *atabaque* faces the line of women. He crosses the line of five

women to arrive upstage left where the other musicians are located while the women sit on the floor in front of one transparent box looking down into the boxes of water, toward the white rocks. Hands play an important role in the piece, as they do in Candomblé. In Candomblé ritual of initiation the Iyalorixá uses the hands to prepare food for the Orixás related to that person, they create the altar for that person's saints, they prepare herbs to consecrate the body of the initiate, among other things. While in Candomblé the Iyalorixás give birth to the practitioner through their hands - the practitioner birth again to the Orixás and the hands are also one of the main means for storytelling in the dance-prayers, in Santos's piece dancers manipulate elements such as water and rocks, suggesting images related to the oracle of *Ifá* – Yoruba system of divination, paper, and textiles suggesting their use as *ojá*s, ceremonial fabric strips worn in Candomblé to protect the chest and head. The glamour of elderly *asé* women who wear on their hands and arms rings and bracelets in its majority obtained from their initiation and subsequent ceremonies confirming their commitment to the Orixás of one, three, seven, fourteen, and twenty-one years, are represented in the performers' use of shiny, colored rings and bracelets. Hands are the focus of the first scene when after adorning themselves, the dancers clap their hands together in the *paó* ritual. Then, they place their hands in the boxes and freely manipulate the water and rocks to create a watery melody. That sounds become part of a symphony when combined with the discreet and low-volume sound of the musical instruments. That sounds are in fact the music.

In Yoruba cosmology the water is an important element. In the myth of creation of the human, for example, Obatala, the divinity who was designated for this task, after

try to use different material such as soil finds help with Nanã. Nanã tells him that soil needs water to provide the appropriate modeling material for this. Moreover, water is associated to many of the feminine Orixás representing fertility and fluidity. Santos's use of water reaffirms the presence of the feminine on stage along with the choice of having only women dancing.

Alongside the actual creation of sounds in which the bodies relate to other elements—such as a long piece of brown paper being transformed into beautiful *ojás* for the head and chest, and the red, blue, yellow, and pink fabrics that mobilize dancers through the same image that inspires them but which provoke completely different images and sounds—the dancers' bodies are explored as instruments. As an example of this, I use the moment in which the drummer playing the rhythm of *Ijexá*, a rhythm played in sacred space for Oxum and in secular spaces in *Afoxé* parades, gradually reduces the volume of the drumming and the bodies that were moving start to explore fragmented movements suggesting the *Ijexá* rhythm is played through the bodies. The choreographer's intent is having bodies in motion red as instruments. The opposite is also explored in the piece when a vibraphone is wheeled onto center-stage; the performers start to push, turn, pull, and interact with the instrument in a dance that transforms the instrument into another dancing body on the stage.

All the aforementioned aspects that characterize Santos's choreography as an audacious, precious creation make the articulation of black women even more significant in her piece. Two specific moments invite the voices of women who are not physically present but are represented on a large scale. In one moment, performers echo Conceição

Evaristo's words, reciting excerpts of her poem *Vozes-Mulheres* (*Women-Voices*) with overlapping voices while walking in circles, falling, recovering, and creating a whirlwind with their movements. *Vozes-Mulheres* talks about "the history of black women, when the collective memory is preserved, [revealing] the ancestry, which projects itself into the present and prepares for the future" (Mendes 113). In another moment, the testimonies of recognized leaders of Brazilian Candomblé mentioned above provoke laughter, relaxation, and reflection while affirming their racial, gender, and religious identities, but also reminding the audience about colonization and the idea imposed by Portuguese colonizers suggesting that history "started when the ships of Pedro Álvarez Cabral arrived in Brazil" (Machado in "Mulheres do Asé"). In answering the question "What does it mean to be an asé women?" these women bring to light topics like religious commitment, differentiated way of understanding community building, respect for the elders, their behaviors' cultural influence in Brazilian society and the importance of respect for the differences. They transmit much wisdom and power through their testimonies demonstrating that "[their] breath has *asé*, [their] saliva has *asé*, their navel has asé" (Iya Nla Beata de Iyemonja in "Mulheres do Asé"). This piece also works in opposition to the increasing number of violent attacks, both symbolic and physical, against African-derived religious houses and practitioners throughout the history but in large scale that year. Only in Nova Iguaçu, Rio de Janeiro, there were registered eight situations in which four to five men with guns, invaded the *terreiros*, broke Orixás altars, burn down the spaces, and in several cases also tortured practitioners that were present. Also, significantly, the piece honors and memorializes the voices of three Iyalorixás who

passed away after the staging of the piece, Iyá Nla Beata de Yemonjá (1931 – 2017), Iyá Nla Stella de Oxossi (1925 – 2018), and Makota Valdina (1943 – 2019).

> **Women Voices**
> The voice of my great-grandmother
> echoed as a child inside the ship's bowels.
> Echoing moans of a lost childhood.
> The voice of my grandmother
> echoed obedience to the white owners of everything.
> The voice of my mother whispered
> echoes of revolt in the very end of the other's kitchens under the trusses of whites' dirty linen along the dusty road towards the slum.
> My voice still echoes perplexing verses in rhymes of blood and hunger.
> The voice of my daughter uniting all our voices gathers within itself the dumb silenced voice choking in our throats.
> The voice of my daughter gathers within itself speech and action. Yesterday, today, now. In my daughter's voice the resonance will be heard the echo of freedom-life. (Evaristo, de Andrade, and Tillis 85)

As the piece draws to a close, the women bring to light the importance of welcoming and love among black women, and Santos is not afraid of taking time to show this on stage. Collective hugs, gestures of reverence and respect to each other, and contact with audience members by offering them *elekés* [143], specific necklesses, and touching their hands reveal the importance of cultivating ties and empowering themselves as a collective. The piece closes with the women moving back in the direction of the

[143] Eleké – sacred neckless used within and in some cases outside the *terreiro*.

semi-circle of boxes filled with water, from which they throw water into the air, getting the audience wet. As a final gesture, they take one of their bracelets, toss it into the water, and return to their initial pose from the start of the piece. Although it is not explicit, there is a sense of beginning-middle-end once the piece opens representing the breath of life, through which performers awaken to movement and life, and it closes with the opposite trajectory: from movement to static poses, taking a breath and becoming statues again, representing death, or a suspension in time in which the body is dead but the essence is in suspension.

If through this creation Santos receives the acknowledgement of choreographic maturity due to her aesthetic-political choices, the presence of the five black women, former dancers of Odundê—with the exception of Rejane, who is a poet from a different university department—working as performer-creators is fundamental to the success of the piece. The experiences carried by each one of these artists certainly contributed to Santos's trust in a process in which she could provide a space for them to act with autonomy and freedom. Tânia Bispo, for example, found a way to represent the "phallus of *asé* women" while she sculpted a pointed hat with the brown paper onstage. If the image onstage is powerful because of its reference to Exu and his interventions in the intersections of communication between dimensions, her explanation of what that image represents is even more meaningful. As Bispo describes:

> We, *asé* women, need to have a phallus to hold up something that transcends our bodies and is not seen; it is felt. So, if you do not have a phallus you cannot sustain yourself because every day, you encounter a denial from the world. The world denies the bodies of these women. It denies by devaluing these Candomblé women. When you go into a bank

> wearing an *eleké*[144] around your neck you are not looked at like other women. You have to impose [your presence].[145] (Bispo)

The phallus gains a connotation of imposition, in this explanation, though Bispo also refers to this as audacity, determination, and persistence. By using a term and symbol related to a masculine kind of power, Bispo re-signifies and envisions this power as gender-neutral. *Mulheres do Asé* opens up space for black women to show their phallic power through simple but singular gestures and movements, imagery, visual poetry, and different types of sounds, including drums, water, violin, vocalizing, crumpled paper, vibraphone, drums, breath, and the sounds of moving bodies.

SILVESTRE AND THE BALÉ FOLCLÓRICO DA BAHIA: AFRICANIST APPROACHES

When Silvestre was invited to choreograph with the Balé Folclorico da Bahia (BFB), the company already had an international reputation, having participated in a tour through Berlin, Germany (1992), and Lyon, France (1994 Lyon Dance Biennale). Under the influence of years working with Viva Bahia Dance Ensemble, dancer-choreographers Walson Botelho (Vavá)[146] and Eutaciano Reis de Oliveira Junior (Ninho Reis)[147] brought to their compositions the imprints of a strong connection with the traditional, as indicated by the titles of their first choreographies: *Dança de Origem* (Dance of Origin), *Ritual de*

144 Elekés are sacred neckless used within and sometimes also out of the *terreiro.*
145 Nós, mulheres do asé, precisamos ter falo para sustentar algo que transcende do nosso corpo e que não é visto; é sentido. Então se você não tiver um falo, você não sustenta porque a cada dia que você vira, você vê uma negação do mundo. O mundo nega o corpo dessas mulheres, Nega desqualificando mulheres do Candomblé. Quando você sai com uma conta no pescoço e entra num banco você não é vista igual as outras mulheres. Você tem que impor [sua presença]. (Bispo)
146 Walson's nick name.
147 Eutaciano's nick name.

Purificação (Purification Ritual), *Pantheon do Orixás* (Pantheon of the Orixás), *Puxada de Rede* (Bringing in the Nets), *Xangô* (Shango), *Maculelê*, *Capoeira*, and *Samba de Roda* are examples of works created in 1988 by Botelho, Reis, and the Bahian guest choreographer Augusto de Omolú, who choreographed *Dança de Origem.* The Brazilian scholar Maria de Lurdes Barros Paixão, who analyzed the creations of the BFB, identifies three periods dedicated to the choreographic process; the first one occurred in 1988, the second in 1996, and the third in 2000. It was in 1993–1994 that Silvestre was invited to choreograph an opening piece for the company's next show.[148]

Botelho's bet on Silvestre's creation *Afixirê* (1994)[149] , "dance of happiness," was neither excessive nor hasty, as it became the flagship piece of the company and was performed extensively in subsequent years. By engaging with elements of West African dance, in *Afixirê* Silvestre brings to light the vibrant and celebratory face of Afro-Brazilian dances. However, the "face" of Afro-Brazilian dances that Silvestre highlights in this piece differs from the ones previously staged by the BFB. While the choreographies from 1988 referred to Afro-Brazilian popular dances (*maculelê, samba de roda*, and *puxada de rede*, among others) that have a determined movement vocabulary and structure, in *Afixirê* Silvestre illuminates a movement vocabulary that emerges from a mixture of African—especially Senegalese and West African—dances and indiscriminate Afro-Brazilian movements. In other words, she does not engage with specific, particular

[148] By "show," I mean a group of choreographies that together comprise an evening's performance by the Balé Folclórico da Bahia. The company usually performed six choreographies per show.

[149] My analysis was based on the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=um8MskuMUxE

dance vocabularies; rather, she transforms and re-creates "African" dance through an Afro-Brazilian lens. As I discuss in the conclusion, the references Santos and Silvestre made to a simplification of the continent that is represented under the term "Africa," in fact is not a limiting or minimizing attempt but a reference to the imagined homeland. The piece first introduces the group of women dancers, then the group of men, in a third moment, the entire group is dancing together and, finally, the piece moves to the performances of duets and solos in the center of a semicircle. This arrangement suggests the structure observed in West African dance classes[150] and in Afro-Brazilian popular dance practices. In addition, movements borrowed from capoeira sporadically leap out of the dancing. The title *Afixirê* fits perfectly with what the audience sees on stage: a celebration of vitality and force. The piece is celebratory and its high level of energy, Gottschild describes as ephebism, takes the breath of the audience away as it evokes visual and kinesthetic engagement.

> A few minutes later, the dancers rehearsed "Afixire" ("Dance of Happiness"), in which the rapid rhythms and movements, the swirling and tumbling seemed to send their spirits soaring along with their bodies. The dance ends in an explosion of movement and sound that is quite literally stunning. (Schemo)

Diana Jean Schemo's words in the *New York Times* demonstrates the positive impression this piece and the company caused the first time they performed for a U.S. audience. The year of 1996 inaugurated the strong relationship between the BFB and the U.S., and Silvestre played a significant role in this process because that audience had been

[150] This information is based on my experience in West African dance classes I took during a period I was attending to the Alvin Ailey Dance School Summer Intensive Program. I attended to West African dance classes as part of the program.

previously introduced to her work. It is my belief that Silvestre's name contributed to the companies easier access to this unknown audience.

Despite the fact Salvador's black dancer-choreographers tend to pursue a signature in their dancing, teaching, and choreographing, searching for elements that can configure particularities in the way they combine movements and employ choreographic strategies, *Afixirê* provoked a different reaction from dancer-choreographer-instructors in Brazil. The blunt impact of this piece's aesthetics and movement repertory was adopted and incorporated by several other dance professionals in their own practices. The search for singularity allowed the formation of a rich and multiple body of black dance professionals and Afro-Bahian dance variations that is unique to black dance in Brazil, but *Afixirê* marked a generation by leaving its imprint on Afro-Bahian dances developed since its creation.[151]

In a traditional proscenium stage, the piece opens with a drummer playing two *atabaque* drums in a vibrant solo, a non-specifically codified rhythm. His rhythm increasing in pace and volume before falling silent. A slower, marked rhythm indicates the moment when the dancers enter the stage. First, a line of eight women crosses the stage from right to left swinging their hips side to side in a syncopated movement, their torsos leaning forward in a diagonal. Waving a straw big fan in one hand as they enter the stage, the women let their arms, shoulders, and head respond to the swinging of their hips, looking side to side and waving their arms in response to the syncopation. The fans

[151] This information is based on the testimony of a few dancers interviewed in this work and on my experience attending to BFB live performances of Afixirê and Afro-Brazilian dance classes in Salvador.

are identical. By wearing a voluminous dark short skirt layered over a longer colored one to call more attention to the hips, which evidences their body's sinuous movements, and their arms, belly, and legs skin, these women deploy their beauty. This deployment of the body and beauty as a way to affirm black identity, which was an important strategy of identity affirmation during the 1970s emergence of black movement in Salvador, is explored in this piece. Around their neck they wear a kind of large textile necklace in straw that loosely covers the chest without completely covering their bare breasts.[152] I speculate that the torso's nudity makes a reference to Indigenous and African aesthetics that, in some tribes, naturalize nudity. The choice for the nudity of black women positions them simultaneously in a position of power and vulnerability. The piece does not hold a sexual appeal but in deploy black women's nudity it reinforces a stereotype and trend to hypersexualize them. Silvestre choice to show women's power and liberation positions them in a vulnerable space.

Following the line of women that move across the stage, a line of men re-design the trajectory by crossing the stage in the same direction. In contrast, their movements highlight the repeated pulling of their arms to their chest, which is curved forward, as their legs execute a movement sequence consisting of one sharp, syncopated lunge backward, followed by three steps forward on the beat. Following the entrance of each group onto the stage, the men and women perform the same movements: jumping, moving their hips, and establishing a relationship when they turn to face each other.

[152] Sometimes dancers' breast are exposed and other times they are covered by the necklace.

The piece is divided into two parts: the introduction, described above, which seems to present the dancers and their movements as a group, and a second part that becomes an exhibition of high intensity and energy felt through the pace and range of movements performed. As choreographer, Silvestre uses a lot of accented head movements and high, energetic jumps. Two-by-two the dancers start to come center-stage to perform different sequences of part-structured, part-improvised movements while the rest of the group frames them in a semicircle, dancing more discreetly and in unison. Soloists come and go. While the choreography draws to a close, a dancer establishes a closer relationship with the audience by dancing front and center at the edge of the stage before inviting an audience member to perform on stage with them—a feature that would become part of BFB's performance profile—and the grand finale suggests a festive encounter. *Afixirê* takes the audience's breath away not only due to its pace and almost excessive energy, but also due to its overall appeal. If Botelho had any doubt about this piece as an opening or closing choreography, he was successful by opting to close the show with this piece. Thus, BFB always leaves the audience with a "desire for more." Rebekah Fowler, a U.S. dancer who experienced that with BFB as an audience member, declared in an interview during my fieldwork: "In 2000 or 2001, after returning from my 6-month stay in Brazil, the BFB performed in San Antonio; during Afixirê, the cast called me onstage and I got to dance with [BFB dancer] Joilson doing some of [assistant artistic director] Nildinha's signature high-energy movements. One of the best moments of my entire life. Ah, saudades!!" (Fowler). In this testimony it is possible to perceive that what Fowler calls "Nildinha's signature high-energy movements," reveals how Nildinha embraced some of

that movements in her teaching. In fact, that were movements that Silvestre incorporated in the choreography and several dancers-instructors absorbed in their practices.

The second piece Silvestre composed for the Balé Folclórico da Bahia was *Fêmeas* (Females)[153], a piece in which women are the protagonists. Like *Afixirê, Fêmeas* emphasizes and refers to African culture more than to Afro-Brazilian popular dances. By imagining the lives of women within their communities before they were brought forcibly to Brazil during the slave trade, this piece aims to portray the life of the women who came before us and witnessed a pre-colonial world and a decent life in Africa. In *Fêmeas* Silvestre works to demonstrate the power of black women on stage through soft smiles, precise movements, and mobilization of the body's core as one of the focuses of the dancing. Although this choreography does not explore directly their sensuality, it is intrinsic and again, can be interpreted as power or vulnerable space of performance.

When the women enter the stage in two groups, the men are already positioned in a semicircle around the edges of the stage, each one seated on the floor with a large earthenware jug between their legs, playing it like a drum by hitting it with two straw paddles. Another a male dancer walks around the stage playing the balafon during the opening of the piece and then walks to upstage center, where he stays until the last part of the choreography. The music transitions to a faster rhythm just before the women enter, one group after the other, executing sharp movements as the groups cross the stage in various configurations (upstage to downstage diagonally, stage right to stage left and vice

[153] This analysis was based on the video accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCE5UGVTRMo.

versa, downstage to upstage, in parallel lines, etc.) before finding their places in a circle. The women execute repeating sequences of travelling movements alternating with movements in place. With closed fists and a strong engagement of the arms, their movements suggest activities such as macerating leaves or planting and harvesting, making a reference to manual labor. The music undergoes a second change in rhythm, which becomes slower and is accented by a drumbeat to which the women respond with repeated contractions of the torso. Through repetition, convergent movements, and the fact that the dancers sing while they dance, Silvestre highlights the collective, representing black community work as a pleasurable, harmonic, and well-performed practice.

The dancers' movements are executed with clarity and highlight the alignment of the limbs, the mobility of the torso, the strength of the arms and legs, and the symbolic importance of the hands. It is through the hands' movement of joining together above the head, pointing downward and then descending through the midline of the body that one can observe Silvestre's gradual incorporation of elements of her technique into her choreography. She has observed that the evolving training of the company's dancers facilitated an increase in the level of technical requirements in her choreographies. The last part of *Femêas* is danced at a faster pace and seems to be a moment in which the men express their appreciation and open a path for the women to leave the stage; here, the men perform in this piece only as supporting artists in the scene. This homage to African women, Afro-Brazilian ancestors, exerts a less explosive reaction from me, as an

audience member, but the sense that one is watching a timeless choreography still remains.

Finally, the third piece choreographed by Silvestre in 2000 was part of BFB's special look toward Brazilian popular dances that reflect much of the country's Indigenous influence. "In *Rapsódia Nordestina*, (North-east elements of Indigenous dances' symbolic gesturality enter the scene" (Paixão 147). *Maracatu, Xaxado, Boi-Bumbá,* and *Ginga* are examples of the aforementioned choreographies. In *Ginga,*[154] Silvestre is able to engage more with a modern dance style without abandoning her connection to the Afro-Indigenous heritage. By exploring the combination of stomping feet and quick twists of the head and torso, characteristic of movements performed in Brazilian Indigenous communities, and unique spatial configurations that create lines, circle, and group formations, Silvestre reminds the audience about important Indigenous tribes. In addition, the use of cockades and adornment on the arms helps create the ambiance of the stage.

It was also in 2000 that Silvestre, along with Bispo, worked on choreographing pieces for the Brazilian opera *O Rei Brasil* (The King Brazil), which explored Indigenous culture and dances. Brazil was completing five hundred years since its "discovery," or colonization, and many artists were producing art to promote reflections about this anniversary, which also allowed critiques and homages to be made. Although I consider *Ginga* to be an homage to the true first Brazilians or "owners of the land," the Indigenous

154 This analysis is based on the video accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzDUisQABrE

peoples, it is curious to observe how U.S. modern dance technique stands out in this choreography, as a reflex of five hundred years of colonial, capitalist, and imperial history.

EDILEUSA SANTOS AND THE DANCE BRAZIL: *SERRA PELADA* AND ALTERNATIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BLACK BRAZILIAN FEMALE BODY

In *Serra Pelada* (Naked Mountain), Santos goes against the grain of this trend by presenting the bodies of Dance Brazil's women covered in male costumes. Long pants, baggy t-shirts, hair tucked up inside a hat, and a "way of walking" that is completely different from what Natasha Pravaz describes as the Brazilian *mulata*'s walk slow, large, and accompanied by the hips. In *Serra Pelada*, the steps are large, straight, without much engagement of the hips, delineating clear and defined trajectories through space. By engaging with transvestism and masculinity as a way to explore the history of Brazilian men who immersed themselves in a mad dash toward gold and riches during "the biggest gold rush of the twentieth century," (Victor Lopes) *Serra Pelada*, Santos creates an alternative representation of Brazilian female bodies in the U.S. In addition to their transvestism—in the sporadic moments when a woman dancer engages with sensuality in this piece—Santos uses choreography to address a critique about the commodification and devaluation of those subjects in that territory. As a predominantly male space where men stayed for months isolated from their families (on the mountain), the women's presence there was sporadic and they were often objectified either as prostitutes, who went to satisfy their sexual fantasies, or as imagined prizes that would be bought with the money that "gold" would provide.

It was also in this piece that Santos reached the apex of her proposal to integrate dancers and *capoeiristas* in her choreography: Male dancers, female dancers, and *capoeiristas* actually share the scenes and play the same roles as *garimpeiros*, or gold miners. For those familiar with the structure of the company and the performers' specific backgrounds, it was surprising to see the level of integration and parity between the dancer Ailton Sacramento and the *capoeirista* Contra-Mestre Pequinês, for example, while watching the duet in which their movements are synchronized and demonstrate equal familiarity with the style. Friendship and support are suggested through movements that play with raised legs, inclined torsos, *negativa* – a traditional capoeira movement, and straightened arms across the line of the shoulders, among others. Their equilibrium in the scene reveals a closeness in terms of stage experience with dance, which deconstructs any separation between their roles. This piece blurs multiple divisions and allows the audience to actually dive into the history of "115 thousand men [who] dug up 100 tons of gold and carried it on their backs up a 150-metre high mountain" (Victor Lopes).

A reproduction of a red mountain with two ladders positioned upstage-center and a mud-colored fabric covering the cyclorama transform the stage into a piece of the *Serra Pelada*; a space in which dancers walking backward/forward or upstage/downstage and performing multiple actions simultaneously create a dynamism and ambience that remind the audience of hard work, perseverance, and hope, as well as human greed, rivalry, and manipulation. The reproduction of the mountain made by a platform allows dancers to move up and down through the ladders and dance up-mountain creating another level on stage. The piece opens and closes with the same soloist onstage. In the opening, he

demonstrates enthusiasm and willingness while moving side to side while he digs, carries bags on his back, and searches around the space. Short, precise, repetitive movements are performed until the discovery of a big "gold rock." The opening moment closes with the soloist running in big circles as he celebrates his discovery, opening up the stage for others to arrive. In the closing part, the soloist appears listless, left alone while seated on a ladder, looking downward and expressing frustration and disappointment. He remains onstage to show that he did not give up.

Twelve dancers start to go on and offstage, delineating multiple paths toward the mountain and around it, alternating moments of encounters through short blocks of movement repeated in different directions with different partners at different times. Small groups perform short, differentiated sequences of movement simultaneously and change from place to place, creating a sort of organized chaos. The piece is short—twenty-three minutes—but the dynamic narrative makes it a perfect timing. Solo, group, and duet within the group, group, and solo is the way small pieces emerge within the larger narrative. By keeping the stage full most of the time, Santos sets the tone of the piece by reminding the audience of the "biblical proportion" of people moved by faith in that search for gold; a high level of energy is maintained for almost the entire length of the piece.

As I mentioned before, *Serra Pelada* reveals Santos's courage to challenge representations of (black) Brazilian women onstage as she does not explore their sensuality or even feminine beauty and charm, characteristics she is not afraid to address in other choreographies such as *Camará* and *Ginga*. The transvestism of women dancers

reveals Santos's playing with "moments of subversive confusion" (Lyle 946). Timothy Lyle describes these moments of subversive confusion as those in which the "cultural semiotic system that promised you the opportunity to read gender and its 'natural' biological accompaniment has failed" (Lyle 946). These are moments of unexpected conflict of sign, significant and produced meaning in which signs of masculinity, for example, are observed in female bodies, producing meanings that blur preconceived notions of gender. The interesting thing is that Santos did not choose to work exclusively with male dancers. She wanted to have the women dressed as men, engaging in a piece that explored masculinity. This alternative way of transposing preconceived notions of gender challenges the aforementioned "Brazilian international identity." Moreover, through this transvestism she creates space for a reflection about sexuality, which is subtly present also in the male-male duet aforementioned. The reflection on the existence of black Brazilian female queerness and homosexuality become possible through.

Despite the predominant presence of men in *Serra Pelada*, there are moments in which women are featured onstage. In one key point in the piece, a woman comes to the stage wearing a short, form-fitting dress and employs all of her feminine sensuality while dancing to the *baião*[155] rhythm. Santos uses this moment as a critical approach to a male-dominated space. From the dynamic, non-stop movements that suggest the hard work on the mountain during the opening choreography, Santos proposes a break in the energy of the piece, which is called out by a scream of liberation—the singer shouts

155 Baião is a musical genre whose term derives from *baiano* (person who was born in Bahia). It was known in the Northeast of Brazil since the late 19th century played in accordion. http://basilio.fundaj.gov.br/pesquisaescolar/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=480&Itemid=181

"*Liberou!*"(literally, "liberated," meaning that one is free to rest) to suggest a time of relaxation in the midst of the stress of daily heavy labor. The *boi-bumbá* [156] then enters the stage and the *baião* rhythm begins, as does the celebration of life. The roles played by women on the mountain, usually as prostitutes, are represented by the dancer. In the choreography, one female dancer transitions from a pleasurable couples dance to being the object of a fierce dispute between men who start to pull, push, throw, and manipulate her as if she were a rag doll. In exploring the woman's violent, physical manipulation, Santos critiques the objectification and devaluing of women in that space and in the broader social context. On the other hand, it is also important to consider that the intentional exploration of the image of a women being manipulated and treated with aggressive movement as a critique can turn it into an additional reproduction of that acts against women.

The choreographer also questions the limits imposed by gender divisions in her work *Camará,* when she includes the female dancer Claudia Guedes in her choreography of *maculelê,* typically performed only by men in dance companies.[157] As a dance-fight that involves movements emphasizing strength, disputes, or challenges by showing one's ability to perform high jumps and kicks, spinning while kneeling on the floor, and

156 Boi-Bumbá is a popular spectacle that is part of the Christmas cycle and several times is also performed during the Carnival. This specific name is used at the state of Amazônas. http://basilio.fundaj.gov.br/pesquisaescolar/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=480&Itemid=181

157 Examples can be found in other pieces by Dance Brazil, Balé Folclórico da Bahia, and others.

striking two wooden sticks together[158] throughout the choreography to follow the *maculelê* beat, keep time, and represent the fight, *maculelê* evokes a masculine energy, which Guedes embraces with mastery in this piece, without dressing like a man. In *Serra Pelada*, the four women dancers demonstrate their ability to masterfully perform masculinity.

The gold rush is an important part of Brazilian history, one not often represented in dance. This historical approach, which reflects much of the history of black working-class people in Brazil follows Santos's appeal to re-create these narratives through dance. *Quilombos*, the first piece she composed within Dance Brazil, is another example of this. By telling the story of the arrival of Africans in Brazil and their struggles for freedom, Santos creates a piece that combines memories of suffering and vulnerability with those of struggle and freedom. She opens up space for a refection about slavery, pain, and resistance without transforming the piece into a spectacle of black suffering. The piece is divided into two parts: one that explores the journey from Africa to Brazil and the organization of blacks/Africans in Brazil toward liberation; the second part explores contemporary practices and contributions by Africans to the formation of Brazilian society and culture.

Santos opens the piece with contrasting religious references: the representation of a Catholic ceremony and the symbol of the cross, which is projected against the

158 In *maculelê*, dancers hold a wooden stick in each hand and strike them together every three beats and strike the stick of another dancer on the fourth beat, using a variety of improvised movements such as kicks, jumps, and turns in between each fourth beat to create a high-energy interaction with their "opponent."

backdrop, contrast against the dancers' performance of the clapping that makes up the *paó*, a gesture from Candomblé which means, "I sacrifice my hands to symbolize one's bodily transformation," a sacrifice for the Orixás. By referring to Catholicism in relation to the forced travel of Africans to Brazil, Santos highlights the influence of Christianity in the process of colonization and uses the element of Candomblé as an indicator of a resistant memory that crossed the ocean with Africans and served to empower and reconnect them in new, foreign spaces. Throughout the piece, Xangô, the Orixá of justice, is referenced and the dancers end the first part of the piece showing they are prepared to go to war, a war in which women played a significant role and which left a leader standing like Zumbi of Palmares, the most well-known *quilombola*.[159]

The second part of *Quilombos* is inspired by the contemporary experiences of black subjects in Brazil. The frustration felt by failing to achieve all of one's dreams is expressed in the lyrics of the music to which the piece is set. These shattered expectations are represented at the beginning of the piece when a woman dancer looks around as she were lost and afraid of something. With her hands covering her mouth, she moves throughout the space, going from place to place, unable to stay in one place. Her performance seems to make reference to the homeless in Brazil. In contrast to this opening scene, in the following moment a male dancer dressed in a suit walks toward a group of dancers that are moving in a block. The group establishes places to stay still but moves to a different place each time the solitary man joins them. There is something

[159] A *quilombola* is the term for a member of a *quilombo* settlement¸ or communities of escaped slaves that first formed in the jungles of Brazil during the colonial period

about the dancers' way of looking that highlights the contrast between the scenes. While the woman has no fixed focus and looks around frantically, the man has a clear focus and walks in straight lines toward his intended destinations. This scene suggests the difficulty of the black subject in occupying certain spaces of power in society and the difficulty of belonging to a black community when he or she engages in a career that is not the one engaged with by the majority of people in her/his community.

Despite this demonstration of disappointment and failure to achieve one's expectations, the bodies of the dancers in this piece have a kind of swing in their step, and the subtle smiles on their faces reveal a sort of optimism. The other scenes in this piece explored union, determination, and spontaneity in their bodies and dancing. Santos reminds the audience about the participation of black people in the formation of Brazilian society, revealing much of their ability to overcome the challenges and value their cultural productions. In sum, *Quilombos*'s second part explores the ongoing tension between action and oppression, achievements and failures, dreaming and stagnation.

While historic events inspire Santos's creations in *Quilombos* and *Serra Pelada*, *Camará* and *Ginga* are compositions that combine fragments of dances inspired by specific Afro-Brazilian popular dances such as *afoxé, mariscada,* samba, capoeira, and *blocos Afro,* among others. In *Camará,* Santos plays with these dances by recreating them while adding variations on space, time, costumes, and props. In Santos's *afoxé* the dancers create visual effects with the fabric of their long skirts, fanning them as if they were wings, moving side to side, spinning, and drawing circles in the air —images that are completely different from the ones created in popular performances of *afoxé*. In

mariscada the use of old-fashioned lanterns (*lampiões*) refers to the women's practice of gathering shellfish at night. The romantic *Capoeira do amor* duet and a final upbeat *batucada* performed by the group complement this festive cultural piece.

SILVESTRE IN THE U.S.: CHOREOGRAPHING BRAZIL

Silvestre's solo career as a choreographer began in the U.S. in 1992 with *Tenda dos Milagres* (Tent of Miracles), which premiered at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery in New York City. The piece, inspired by Jorge Amado's book of the same name, was acknowledged for its reference to two aspects of Amado's story: the main character's (Pedro Arcanjo) strong personality and leadership, which was necessary for his confrontation of racial and religious prejudice; and the festive character of Bahian culture. As I mentioned before, the *New York Times* critic identifies two different moments in the piece: the moment in which the story is told, and the moment when Bahian culture can be "rejoined" (Anderson "Dance in Review"). This division, as previously discussed, reveals a trend to create expectations about Dance Brazil's previous emphasis only on capoeira and popular dance expressions. Silvestre uses the story of the novel to inspire her exploration and representation of the character's conflicts and encounter with divine powers. While Jorge Amado presents women in a highly sexualized manner, reinforcing stereotypes about black and *mulata* women, Silvestre transforms women into divine forces to which Arcanjo relates in the choreography. According to Anderson, three women represent sexual (divine) powers. In my analysis of one of the piece, I observe that the presence of women is related to a sexual energy, but I

do not see their bodies overtly displayed or dancing that overemphasizes their sexuality. What Anderson critiques is the exaggerated demonstration of power in the presence of Pedro Arcanjo, but it is not clear whether it is a critique of the dancer's performance or of the choreography. He writes, "Unfortunately, the action was not always clear. Mr. Brito, the company's associate artistic director, proved to be a strong dancer. If anything, he looked too strong. He appeared so confident at the outset that it was hard to believe that the gods had anything new to teach him" (Anderson "Dance in Review"). The apotheosis of the closing piece reveals Silvestre's reference not only to cultural elements of Bahia, where the novel takes place but with elements typically from Rio de Janeiro as well: Silvestre enters the stage in the final moment of the piece as a *porta-bandeira* (in the Brazilian samba schools, the dancer who carries the school's flag), dancing around with the *mestre-sala* (the *porta-bandeira*'s guardian) while holding a blue flag. All the dancers perform samba and celebrate that moment.

It is interesting to observe that Silvestre's creations in the U.S. tended to reinforce her connection with Afro-Brazilian roots, namely Candomblé and Yoruba mythology. In *Tenda dos Milagres*¸ these were essential aspects of Amado's novel and, in fact, one of the main points of discussion: religious prejudice and syncretism. By watching the video of the choreography and bringing to this analysis my own lived experience in Bahia, I can draw parallels in the relationship between Arcanjo and the three women and the divine relationship between Xangô and Oxum, Oyá, and Obá as his wives.

The same can be said about the choreography Silvestre created with Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Company about the Orixá known as Tempo (Time), worshiped in

certain Candomblé houses. In this choreography, as Silvestre describes, the way she opened up space for experimentation and exploration of the group's attention during the performance was particularly interesting. According to Silvestre, "the process was the most important part [in this creation] because it does not have counting; the movement and rhythm follow the emotions, not a counting" (Silvestre). She borrowed from the traditional but found ways to be experimental not only through the addition of Silvestre Technique in her compositions but also by challenging other components of a choreography, such as space and time.

Silvestre has also been very active in Viver Brazil, having created several choreographies for the group. Founded in 1997 by Linda Yudin and Luiz Badaró in Los Angeles, California, the company is known for its work honoring Brazil's African legacy through contemporary dance theater, collaborations with Bahian choreographers and music directors, and cultural exchange and an immersion in Brazilian dance creations. In the U.S., Silvestre's choreographies have highlighted Afro-Brazilian culture, as I mentioned before, in contrast to the elements she emphasized in her creations with BFB. Whereas in Brazil she examined Brazil's African roots, in the U.S. she looked at Afro-Brazilian elements, drawing heavily from capoeira, samba, and Candomblé. In *Orixás* (2007), *The Three Wives of Xango* (2006), and *Alaafia/Harmony* (2010) she addresses dances and themes related to Candomblé; in *In Motion* (2007/2010) and *Mo-Ifé: Love Stories* (2006) she draws from capoeira. Just like her work with the BFB, Silvestre seems to leave her imprint on the work of other choreographers who have worked with Viver Brazil, including Vera Passos, who have anchored their works in the divine power,

myths, and dances of the Orixás. Silvestre has created a global dance community that continues to grow and expand.

Another example of movement identity and the ongoing forging of a black dance diaspora can be found in a video recording of a Viver Brasil *bloco Afro* rehearsal for a show performed at the Hollywood Bowl in 2016.[160] In the video, when the dancers emerged, called onstage by the drums as in the Afro-Brazilian *bloco* Ilê Ayê, I saw black women moving regally like queens, displaying their long, beautiful arms and engaging with that special energy and the body's gesturality; as I watched the video, I felt like I was back in Salvador. All the dancers—black, white, latin@—showed a familiarity with those movements that reveals the potential of diasporic connections and the power that lays in exchange and unity generated through migrations and an openness to knowing, respecting, and sharing among black communities and cultures. The video left me emotionally touched because it was a sign that what I am identifying as important in the movement across diaspora has a potential that I had not previously measured: transnational movement that can transform bodies, physicalities, and spiritualities to create memories that go beyond a geographically fixed experience.

[160] Available at https://vimeo.com/182497539.

Chapter 5: Playing with Intability: Resonances of Silvestre's and Santos's Work in My Own Practice

In 2018 I participated in the third bi-annual conference of the Collegium for African Diaspora Dance (CADD) in Durham, North Carolina. My participation as the leader of a workshop on playing with instability and my contact with other artists were key to my reflections on the ways in which this dissertation has resonated in my own work and indicated possibilities for future explorations. Using this event as the primary source of investigation, in this chapter I look at the methodological proposal of alternative axes of action and my pedagogical practice. In chapters 1 through 4, the concept of alternative axes of action in relation to the works of Santos and Silvestre serves as a metaphorical lens through which I look at their aesthetic choices and general actions as artist-researchers who have created alternative methodologies, historic interventions, and representations of black Brazilian women bodies in choreographies. In this chapter, I emphasize the corporeal experience and approximation of what I conceptualize and propose as alternative (postural and movement-related) axes and playing with instability in bodily experiences. In other words, in this chapter I return to the bodily dimension of the concept of observing and establishing connections between the moving-body-self in the methodology I propose and its connections with other artists' practices.

In February 2018, the third bi-annual conference of the Collegium for African Diaspora Dance (CADD) took place at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, bringing together scholars, dance practitioners, educators, and other individuals from the

most diverse parts of the world interested in "center[ing] African diaspora dance as sources and methods of aesthetic possibility" (DeFrantz 2018). The participation of artists who are developing work in Guadeloupe, Jamaica, Cuba, Brazil, Haiti, the U.S., Zimbabwe, Barbados, Honduras, and other countries not only demonstrated the richness and potential found in specific aspects of global black dance but also revealed the organizers' efforts to de-center these studies from the U.S. The participation of Marianna Monteiro, one of the keynote speakers and a Brazilian scholar who, during the event, screened her documentary on the life and career of black Brazilian dancer-choreographer Mercedes Baptista (1921-2014), was one example that held special meaning as a facilitator of dancer-choreographers' access to art created in Brazil and to works by Brazilian scholars, information that has not been much publicized outside the country and that had limited presence in previous CADD conferences.[161]

Alongside this movement toward the de-centering of African diaspora dance perspectives and studies observed at the 2018 CADD conference, another trend emerged at that gathering: the look at the intersection of African diaspora dance studies and black feminisms, the primary theoretical framework embraced in my dissertation. That same year, concomitant to the 2018 CADD Conference, the Duke University hosted three events of the Afro-Feminist Performance Routes, an initiative developed by a collective of "women dance artists of the African diaspora who navigate interrelated processes of movement, migration, and memory in their work" (Afro-Feminist Performance Routes

[161] This information is based on the programs of the 2014 and 2016 CADD conferences. I participated in 2014 as a member of one of the only panels with a focus on Brazil.

2018). Léna Blou (Guadeloupe), Rujeko Dumbutshena (Zimbabwe/U.S.), Sephora Germain (Haiti), Halifu Osumare (U.S.), and Yanique Hume (Jamaica/Cuba/Barbados) shared some of their research and explorations in roundtable discussions and workshops. By initiating corporeal and intellectual conversations around the work black women have created in Africa and the African diaspora, the event facilitated connections and reflections on how links have been established through commonalities and differences and how they can contribute to the creation of union, empowerment, and creative freedom without erasing local particularities. It was during that event that I myself was nourished by the discovery of a link between my work and the work of Léna Blou,[162] which I will describe in the next section. While describing this discovery, I focus on how the work developed by artists within the African diaspora can demonstrate a mutual interest, in this case, interest about instability as a condition of existence, especially for black women. In looking at that link with Léna Blou I argue that the forging of a black feminist dance diaspora has led to the emergence of links and common interests, even without physical migrations and contacts.

These two aspects helped me understand the relevance of my research to the field of African diaspora dance. This understanding was related to a trend in the field that is different from the trend I described in Chapter 2. Whereas in Chapter 2 I emphasize the relevance of my research to the lack of a privileged place held by women dancer-

[162] Léna Blou is a Guadaloupean dancer-choreographer who founded *Le Centre de Danse et d'Études Chorégraphiques* (Center for Dance and Choreographic Studies) – located in the L'Assainissement district of Pointe-à-Pitre. Léna Blou developed the Techni'ka, a technique based on rhythms and gestures drawn from the local dance known as *gwoka* (http://lenablou.blogspot.com/).

choreographer-educators in narratives about and within the black Brazilian dance community and, conversely, I dedicate special attention to the work of some of those women, here I understand the importance of my research as part of an emergent movement in which artist-scholars are particularly interested in the experience of black women within the African diaspora. In this sense, instead of merely offering a differential that contrasts with previous research and describing a trend in the Brazilian dance field, my work demonstrates that it aligns with the work of other artist-scholars situated within a broader theoretical perspective and across the African diaspora. Thus, I can assert that my participation at this conference helped me to locate my research within the field by acknowledging its relevance to the de-centering of African diaspora dance perspectives and the growing explorations of the intersection between African diaspora dance and black feminisms.

Despite the importance of noting the de-centering of scholarship, the growing interest on black feminisms and African diaspora dance, and the similarities between my work and that of Léna Blou, the most meaningful contribution of the 2018 CADD event to my work was the opportunity to use my corporeal methodology proposal to reflect on the way in which Silvestre's and Santos's creation of alternative axes of action resonates in my own practice. After six years of research that led to a deeper understanding of the work of these dancer-choreographer-educators, three questions came to mind: Which aspects observed in Silvestre's and Santos's actions have I adopted in my practice? Which (alternative) language am I using? How have participants responded to the idea of reimagining balance between positions of instability? In order to answer these questions,

I look back to my analysis of Silvestre's and Santo's work illuminating more subtle aspects of it, and I analyze the impressions expressed by a few participants in my workshop at the 2018 CADD conference.

Throughout my years of experience working as a dancer-researcher-creator, my interest in Afro-Brazilian popular and ritualistic dances and culture have clearly guided my choices in terms of the dance companies I have worked with, classes I have taken, and my own choreographic creations. This interest became more apparent to me as I underwent self-reflective processes in graduate school in Brazil and in the U.S., periods when I often asked myself about my "passion" and the topics that compelled me to dedicate two, three, or even six years of my life to researching, writing, and dancing. As a dance teacher, the methods and content I explored in my classes also underwent a transformation during my years in graduate school; embodied dance and lived memories are part of my current approach to teaching and dancing, and the responses of my students have contributed to my ongoing creation of a teaching philosophy and pedagogy. By identifying key aspects of my teaching at the time of the 2018 CADD workshop, I argue that Silvestre's and Santos's engagement with deep layers of Afro-Brazilian Candomblé as the foundation of their methodologies inspired me to embrace *terreiro* corporealities and Yoruba philosophy in my own way. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, my fascination with the particular way that the entities known as *Caboclos, Marujos*, and *Boiadeiros* move between positions of apparent instability along with the meanings found in the ways that Candomblé practitioners and Orixás move "to show they are alive" propelled me to dive into an investigation of a specific corporeal training and creative

work. This particular corporeal experience enables the creation not only of a new movement vocabulary but also a dancing behavior.

In this regard, my pedagogy at the 2018 CADD workshop introduced movers/dancers to a particular corporeality, one which borrows principles observed in Brazilian Candomblé, capoeira, and samba-de-roda, and encouraged them to experience a different way of accessing movement from sensation to structural shape. Another important aspect that I incorporated into my teaching was the link between the corporeal and socio-political dimensions, in which movers/dancers were often encouraged to unite their danced and lived experiences in their practices and creations. The voices of the women—most of whom were black—participating in my workshop on "playing with instability and reimagining balance" were key to my understanding of the foundational elements of my pedagogy and the connections between their experiences with principles observed in black feminisms.

INSTABILITY AS INSPIRATION: CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE PLAYING WITH INSTABILITY AND *BIGIDI* DANCE IN THE WORK OF LÉNA BLOU

> *Dance steps in gwoka have no name, the name corresponded to gesture. "Bigidi" is to be in imbalance as is the case of the gwoka dancer, we get the impression that he is going to fall but he does not touch the ground. I say to my students who cannot make the "bigidi" to think about contingencies of life, about tough breaks which jostle.… We can even think that it is our capacity to resist, not to be devastated in the difficult times, to start a new life that our ancestors wanted to symbolize through this dance. We are "bigidant" beings*.
>
> Lénablou

As soon as I arrived at Duke University to participate in the Collegium for African Diaspora Dance conference, I had a few interesting encounters. First, I met two

Brazilian scholars. I was first introduced to José Cabral[163] in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, but at the time of our reunion he was teaching in Salvador, Bahia. Second, I was introduced to Sandra Borges,[164] who had inspired my writing on the relationship between Mercedes Baptista and Katherine Dunham during the 1950s, the subject of my master's thesis and an article I wrote while developing my presentation at the 2014 CADD conference. I also ran into Jessica Smith[165], a friend and scholar I met at the University of Texas at Austin in 2012. Born and raised in New York, she completed her PhD at UT Austin and developed her research in Cuba, where she spent almost two years doing her fieldwork. Currently, she is teaching at a University in North Carolina.

These encounters not only helped me to feel welcome in that space but also understand the importance of artist-scholar migrations for enrichment of the field and artistic productions. As I mention in my introduction, "African diaspora dance field" is understood here as an ongoing transnational formation. Moreover, in that encounter, Jessica Smith[166] called my attention to the convergence of interests, research, and production in arts and scholarship. When I spoke to her about my research and the workshop I was going to teach the next day on playing with instability she asked: "Do you know Léna Blou? She was talking about something similar to what you are describing. I believe you should talk to her" (Smith). I was excited to discover that my area of research interest was in alignment with the interests of other black women in the

[163] This is a pseudonym.
[164] This is a pseudonym.
[165] This is a pseudonym.
[166] This is a pseudonym that is used for the same person win the third section of this chapter.

African diaspora and, right after my workshop I started to search for her speeches and workshops.

Léna Blou, also known by her artistic name Lénablou, is a Guadeloupean dancer and choreographer who developed her "Techni'ka" methodology inspired by the *gwoka*, "a dance linked to the history of plantations in her Island" (Blou). The Techni'ka explores the concept of *bigidi* which, as she describes above, relates to the instability of a person who gives the impression that he/she will fall but negotiates between positions of imbalance. Léna Blou, just like Santos and Silvestre, is inspired by the traditional to create her art. As she says, "the *léwòz*[167] night is for me a sacred space. I show its aesthetics, based on this matrix. I do not show the dance steps in a *léwòz*, I do not teach the soul of *gwoka*, I teach a Caribbean technique" (Blou). By understanding *léwòz* as a grammatical structure or protocol that may be followed during the drumming-dancing-singing ritual, Léna Blou feels that the ritual and tradition creates a special environment.[168] Although I could not find a religious connotation in the references I found about *gwoka*, Léna Blou expresses an understanding of a certain spiritual connection or sacral energy in that secular event. The movements that emerge in that space, similar to Candomblé, are later re-imagined and transformed under the gaze and within the bodies of artists such as Santos and Silvestre. This inspiration by vernacular and/or sacred performances is a characteristic I bring to my own creations as well, but

[167] Léwoz are traditional rural musical performances in Martinique and Guadeloupe (Bébel-Gisler 242).
[168] This information can be found at http:/lenablou.blogspot.com/.

there is one specific aspect of Léna Blou's work that speaks directly to my research: the playing with instability and imbalance.

The methodological proposal I develop is particularly inspired by the ritualistic performance of the Candomblé entities known as "*Boiadeiros, Caboclos, and Marujos.*" This proposal, which allowed me to explore alternative axes of action both corporeally and theoretically, and coincides with Léna Blou's specific focus on the *bigidi* and the instability observed in the movements she describes in the opening quotation of this section. In the workshop co-led by Léna Blou and two other artists from the Afro-Feminist Performance Routes at the 2018 CADD conference, it was clear that she was borrowing from premises observed in popular dance and transforming the circle of drumming-dancing-singing into an open space for movers to play with improvisation and a mixture of specific movement vocabulary and personal vocabulary, a union created by each dancer in dialogue with *gwoka* music. Although there was no time for her to thoroughly explore her association of instability with the "contingencies of life," I felt that Léna Blou expands her movement explorations to the socio-political sphere by encouraging movers to use their experiences when dealing with the contingencies of life as a way to understand how their bodies will negotiate with imbalance or remain strong and active while transitioning between positions of imbalance. Everything was connected: my reference to the "nodes of instability and black feminisms" and her attention to the "contingencies of life."

In this dissertation I look at the importance of the physical migrations and exchanges of dancer-choreographers and their continuous forging of a dance diaspora,

especially while analyzing Silvestre's and Santos's travels between Brazil and the U.S. Silvestre plays an important role in the ongoing creation of a [black] dance diaspora. Nevertheless, what my encounter with Léna Blou indicates for further explorations in scholarship and artistic creations is the demonstration of how connections and links among the ideas of dancer-choreographer-educators have been established across the African diaspora—even without direct physical dislocations and contacts. The connections between my research and Léna Blou's work illuminate the emergence of topics and approaches that are closely related and focus on similar themes.

The CADD conference helped me not only to identify the efforts of U.S. scholars to de-center scholarship, but also to see how a black dance diaspora was being forged through the exchange of ideas, feelings, similar lived experiences, interests, and initiatives. In perceiving how playing with instability could be explored through diverse methodologies and pedagogies, I moved to the experience of introducing black women to the concept of alternative axes of action with a new enthusiasm and openness to the responses and the possible resonances of that experience in the work of other black women artists.

EXAMINING MY CORPOREAL PROPOSAL AND THE RESPONSES OF U.S. BLACK WOMEN TO THE PLAYING WITH INSTABILITY

After teaching classes in Salvador (2016) as part of the warm-up process during the creation of Santos's piece *Mulheres do Asé* (described in Chapter 1), my next opportunity to conduct a practical exploration of the fundamentals of that proposal was at the 2018 CADD conference workshop. Working with a group of about twelve women (a

diverse group with a majority of black women), I led three sets of Opening, Modulating, and Closing exercises, with time included for conversations about the participants' impressions of that experience and responses to questions about how that corporeal experience resonated with their experiences in the socio-political dimension. The comments were especially enlightening and served as inspiration for an ongoing development of my methodology and pedagogy.

Although I used the same principles and structure in that movement experience as those which I employed in my teaching with *Mulheres do Asé*, my way of facilitating dancers/movers' access to bodily investigation was slightly different. In the Opening moment, for example, I began with the visualization of an alignment along the vertical axis, encouraging participants to pay attention to the connection of their feet to the earth, and an energy line stretched from the top of their head to the sky. This was similar to the experience that I had taught in Salvador, but this time I gave verbal cues for the transfer of weight to the fingers, the heels, and the outer and inner edges of the feet. This started to awaken the sensation of instability and gradually led dancers/movers to access previously codified movements in their own bodies by feeling the movements, rather than reflecting on the functionality or shapes of those movements.

The following example describes one of the movements built from the initial sensation to the final existing shape. The participants began by first exploring weight transfer in the four cardinal directions and drawing imaginary circles with the top of their heads pointing toward the celling; this guided them toward continuous movement in which they started to explore semi-circles, transferring the weight and arching their back

more intensely to the hills which required the extension of one leg - with bent knee - behind them in order to avoid the falling. My verbal cues encouraged dancers/movers to explore the transfer of weight from one side to the back, using one of the legs in extension to support the body weight and propel the movement of the body moving back to the initial position. By passing through the initial position the body engages in the continuation of that movement transferring weight to front, the opposite side, and back. The other leg is extended to avoid the collapse again. The repetition of these trajectories without interruption and the progressive inclusion of arm movements that responded to the changes in direction and weight are suggestive of the foundational movement of capoeira, known as the *ginga*, without necessarily having that codified movement in mind before executing it, or without accessing previous memories about capoeira and that specific movement. The process is similar to a re-building or re-discovery of the shape of that movement in the body while simultaneously experiencing it. This way of accessing the *ginga* allows a closer understanding of all the minimal transfers of weight involved in that movement, transfers which generate the movement. The almost imperceptible or forgotten trajectory of the body during that movement is re-discovered. In proposing that experience, I aim to guide movers/dancers through movement trajectories and help them access the movement without imposing a final shape on the body to achieve a form they had in mind before actually doing it.

The aforementioned aspect of my pedagogy was an insight I had while preparing the structure of the 2018 CADD workshop, which means I did not explore it in 2016; rather, it was an addition to the 2018 experience. This aspect was observed by Natalia

Brum,[169] a participant in the workshop, as a way of encouraging movement "exploration from the inside to the outside." Brum added: "I found your pedagogy as powerful in a way it challenges, especially Western-trained dancers, to access the dance forms differently." In making reference to "Western-trained dancers" Brum referred to dancers who are mostly trained in dance forms that are often taught in ways that are diametrically opposed to the pedagogy explored in the 2018 workshop. In classical ballet and modern dance, for example, the dancers access the shape and functionality of the movement and try to reproduce those movements, knowing where they want to arrive and how that movement may look; they then explore other components of that movement such as weight, flow, and time, among other elements. This is a practice that has been commonly adopted and adapted in different ways throughout the West. Even if we look at capoeira as a dance-fight form and reflect on how the dancer-*capoeirista* usually accesses that movement vocabulary, the approach to replicating those movements is to see or observe the movement shape as it is demonstrated and then embody it or explore the movement while knowing what it should look like. The main teaching strategy is based on the demonstration of codified movements, followed by the dancer's reproduction of those movements as demonstrated, or through verbal cues that use a pre-determined dance vocabulary to give dancers a functional image of how that movement is executed or what it may look like.

Despite the fact that many alternative ways of teaching the aforementioned Western techniques create other alternatives in terms of the demonstration-reproduction

[169] This is a pseudonym attributed to one of the participants of the workshop.

relationship, it is not rare for dancers to be exposed to pedagogies mired in structures of domination and perceptions of teaching "rooted in the notion that all students need to do is consume information fed to them by a professor and be able to memorize and store it" (hooks 254); a movement that comes in a ready-made shape. Although bell hooks, in her work *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom,* is not referring specifically to the experience of dance classes, her critique of what she calls "banking systems of education" helps us understand Brum's comment. For bodies trained as consumers and reproducers, the way of accessing movement is actually different from the experience of bodies that have been trained as creators with autonomy over their own experiences. In both practices dancers access movements, but while in one case they look at a shape and then study and explore ways to achieve that shape in their own bodies, in the other case they move through unfamiliar ways to reach a shape later.

Looking at Silvestre's and Santos's pedagogies, there are a few verbal cues and actions that have inspired me to engage with this strategy in different ways. Silvestre, for example, typically opens the class in a more improvised moment of recognizing the moving-body-self, the space, and others in that space by activating a triangle of visualization from inside the body. Then, she invites movers/dancers to follow her through that symbology as she tells stories behind those movements and most importantly, calling their attention to their knowledge of their own bodies, which in turn allows them to control and guide their experiences using the symbology and sequences of movement she offers. I am particularly moved by her cues to dancers/movers to "tell their own messages." In this case, Silvestre does not demonstrate movements to be consumed

by showing her own performance of those movements as a model to be followed. Rather, her performance is concomitant to the initial experience that dancers/movers have with the movements. In addition, the oral storytelling is subjective and each dancer/mover develops a particular way of embodying and re-interpreting each story through dance. Santos's pedagogy is not anchored in demonstration, because improvisation is the main component of her methodology. Instead of using demonstration, Santos explores the audible and visual references given by the drum-drummer-composer. In encouraging the experience with movements while they are created in dialogue with the music-musician in each dancer/mover's body, more than consumers, these dancers/movers are producers. Such aspects of these actions, as described in Chapter 3, have marked my own practice.

Another important component of my pedagogy also highlighted by Brum was the way in which the energies of the female Orixás are approached as an added layer that permeates the practice without being obvious or explicit. In other words, as she stated, "Oxum, Iyemonjá, and Oyá are all related to the fluidity observed in the moving and unstable body" (Brum 2018). While I talk about continuous movement as a fundamental aspect of working with instability and the finding or reimagining of balance as a result of negotiations among multiple muscles, the sensation it generates suggests a nuanced movement related to that of the female Orixás. The body's contact along the alternative axes or its transit between axes also suggests the presence of the wind (Oyá), a wind that propels the imbalance, pushing the body off of the vertical axis while simultaneously supporting it. Indeed, the thing that impressed me about the presence of the *Caboclos*, *Boiadeiros, Marujos*, and Orixás in Candomblé *terreiros* and the practitioners'

movements in certain rituals is the way in which they never stopped moving and how the transfer of weight sometimes minimized movements, other times expanding them, modifying the dancing and expression of multiple bodies. Brum's comment is especially meaningful to me because it shows that the language I used was understood even by those who were not as familiar with the Orixás. Without talking about Oxum, or even about the element of water, my instructions to "keep moving" provides a corporeal state that in some cases can make a suggestion or awaken a memory related to those references to the Orixás; for those who are less familiar with such contexts, the references can be different. Regardless, the language used in my verbal cues allows participants from distinct geographic spaces and spiritualities to access the idea of movement. The component highlighted by Brum reminded me of Silvestre's references to the elements of the nature to facilitate access to the movement nuances and Santos's use of the water in her piece *Mulheres do Asé*. In adopting these strategies, Silvestre and Santos expand the range of communication and facilitate access to the cosmology of the Orixás without limiting the possibilities of movement or the dancer/mover's ideas about those movements; whether as verbal cues or as an element onstage, water functions as a subtle reference to the female Orixás in Silvestre's and Santos's pedagogies.

Other aspects have emerged from that experience, such as the perception of an expansion of the body's spatial reach and the palpability of the space. As Jessica Smith[170] observed, through this experience she was able to perceive her body beyond its material and touchable surface. She described the body that was awakened during the practice was

[170] This is a pseudonym attributed to one of the workshop participants.

"a body that felt expanded in the sense it can move reaching further in the surrounding space" (Smith 2018). It suggests a discovery of the body's potential that was previously unknown or underexplored; a potential to stretch itself, not only to touch but also occupy a larger area in the space. This perception led Smith to make two more observations. First, the expansion of the body's spatial reach allows a use of time that explores the rhythm in its full extension. She compared that rhythmic extension to the one she noticed while dancing Afro-Cuban rhythms such as the mambo. "In mambo I feel like the change of movement happens in the limit of the rhythm. The dancer is not late but using the last seconds of the time to make the changing and consequently creating an exciting control over the rhythm." In this comment Smith revealed the element of surprise as a welcomed and rich characteristic of that Cuban dancing that she felt was explored in the playing with instability as well. Smith also felt the space as a partner who supported the moving-body-self, preventing it from falling while it transitions between alternative axes of action.

In addition to participant comments that emphasized the corporeal dimension of the workshop, feedback also linked the corporeal to the socio-political. Sarah Cruz offered a comment that she also connected to a contemporary look at the Combahee River Collective's black feminist statement. Cruz illuminated the fact that while playing with instability in a circular formation with other women, she understood that the movements of one woman had an impact on or intervened in the movements of others: the collective is affected by the actions of one. Cruz calls attention to the responsibility that women have in relation to the effects of their own movements on other peoples'

bodies. As she says, "even though we are not physically touching, it is a reminder that we are all connected" (Cruz). Her words encouraged other participants to mention the importance of a contemporary reflection on the foundational principles adopted by one of the most important black feminist organizations, the Combahee River Collective. Alicia Johnson[171] referred to the book *How We Get Free*, edited by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor and cited earlier in this dissertation because of its relevance to the clear organization of the premises of black feminisms that have supported women's actions since the 1960s to present day. Johnson emphasized their belief in collective process rather than isolated personal initiatives.

The comments I emphasized in this section are important to the continuing development of myself as an artist-researcher and offer components for future reflections. In this sense, my experience teaching this workshop allowed me to not only reflect on the questions and comments offered by dancers/movers, but also to raise an important question for future investigations. How can black women's experiences of oppression and struggles for liberation be represented through movement while the body is simultaneously affected by instability and affects the system by engaging with unstable equilibrium? This question and the concept of alternative axes of action can serve other choreographers who may be interested in challenging fixed choreographed structures, verticalized methods of creation, and stabilized pedagogies. While continuous movement and playing with instability involves risks and a departure from the safety of the already known and comfortable place, it also can create possibilities and transform experiences.

[171] This is a pseudonym.

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